

Mendip



From the Chair

My thanks go to Judith and Mike for writing and editing the last newsletter, I hope you agree it is an amazing work of art and I would personally like to thank Judith for pulling it all together, and Mike for his continuing help .

And leading on from the last edition I am happy to say that we have had an expression of interest from a Mendip Society Member, Pat Frazer, to take over the Secretary's Committee work and she has agreed to give it a trial after attending our last Management Meeting. (Very brave of her considering the amount of 'healthy debate' that went on that morning!).

The Secretary has also written a bit more on this subject of Society officers in the section below.

I am happy to report that there never seems to be a shortfall of Volunteers to help with our two Reserves, and my thanks go to the team who turn up whatever the weather and really enjoy getting stuck in to the task in hand, be it cutting scrub, laying hedges, mending gates, coppicing trees and planting new little whips to make our wood or flower meadow ready for the coming season. But there is always room for one (or two or three) more to join them- they are a very welcoming group. Contact Judith to find out about the next day she has planned.

I look forward to seeing as many Mendip Society Members as possible at our AGM on the afternoon of Friday 14th April. After the necessary business part is done, and being refreshed with our usual tea, coffee and always much enjoyed delicious cakes, we have a very well-known speaker with a highly relevant subject about which he is passionate, to finish the meeting; Mr Mark Green, Farms Director for Alvis Bros Ltd. Non-members are always welcome to join us, especially for the talk, so please do bring any friends whom you think would enjoy the occasion.

Tina Bath



From the Secretary

I am very grateful to Pat for 'taking the plunge' and coming along to see the Society working at first hand, and then volunteering to give it a go.



Page Page content

2	From the Chair and Secretary
3	To 'Capture Moments on Mendip'
4 & 5	It Will Soon be Spring and in the following months we have:-
6 & 7	This Year 2023 – "so Far
8	The AGM on 14th April 2023
9	At St James; Church Hall Winscombe at 2,30om
10	The agenda and reports, & talk by Nick Green of Alvis Bros Ltd
11	The Committee Requests
12	Dew Pond and composting Loo- by Mike Harvey + Tania's Wood shelter
13	Keeping the StarFish Alive and The Book Corner – Mike Harvey
14	A Presidents View + photos for us photos@themendipsociety.org.uk
15	A Sad Occasion for the Society by Jamie Brown
16	The Society Back Page

COVER PHOTO – by Anne Davies
A beautiful sunny morning in February . On a rocky outcrop high on Draycott Sleights, above the row of beech trees, with views of the Somerset levels,(Glastonbury Tor and Bristol Channel on a really clear day).

She says "hopefully it will inspire someone to also come forward to take on one of the other main roles we are missing – an Events Coordinator" was her suggestion.

This was also one of the main things we discussed at our last meeting. Anyone who has been a member of the Society for perhaps the last decade will definitely remember the many different events we used to run for the enjoyment, interest and entertainment of any member who wished to join in. We also attended all manner of festivals, markets, and showground events with our gazebo and book stall displays; often going quite a long way to take part.

Who remembers the Priddy Festivals when we had over a hundred join us for a walk led by Jodie Lewis; or their first visit to the Banwell Bone Caves? Maybe their walk 'Around The Allertons' which included a guided visit of the Windmill by a Windmill Trustee; or the 'Finds Day' at the Kings of Wessex Sports Centre, Cheddar with the Portable Antiquities /team, when people, with their finds queued to see the experts before they had even unpacked their equipment.

Such an exciting a day!

We are working hard to raise our profile and attract more members – you will see from the Membership Officer's report in the AGM papers that this is something we must do to stem the decline in our membership. The Society, therefore, needs to find one or more willing volunteers to undertake, or share, in helping with the task of promoting the Society – primarily publicity and co-ordination of a programme and maybe appearances at local events.

What would be great would be a small group of friends to feel this would be a valuable way of contributing to the Society – and its continuing valuable activities in Mendip. A big job for one person – but for a small team working as one – much more workable. What this means in practice will/ can obviously be the subject of discussion.

One marvellous opportunity presented for such a discussion would certainly be at the AGM on Friday April 14th. All the details for this meeting are in the middle of this newsletter.

Judith Tranter – and Congratulations Anne, for this lovely picture "On Draycott Sleights".

MENDIP SOCIETY MEMBERS INVITED TO CAPTURE MOMENTS ON MENDIP

**By Tim Haselden – Project Development Officer
of the Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Service**

The Mendip Society is supporting a project by the Mendip Hills AONB Service in partnership with Somerset Film, Windrose Rural Media Trust, and Seed Sedgemoor, to create a new community-led photographic exhibition of the spectacular Mendip Hills landscape.

The project called 'Moments on Mendip' will capture and celebrate the twelve special qualities that make Mendip an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) on camera.

"We hope this project will encourage people to spend time in this exceptional landscape, to learn how to capture effective landscape images that celebrate the special qualities of the Mendip Hills and hopefully inspire others to do the same" says project officer Tim Haselden. "The Mendip Hills, with its abundance of caves, gorges, limestone grasslands, drystone walls, stunning views, and ancient human settlements are a unique place of national interest".

Thanks to funding from community arts organisation, Seed Sedgemoor, an Arts Council Creative People and Places project, the Mendip Hills AONB Service is appointing a fine art photographer to join the project as lead artist. Their job will be to capture a series of images and to inspire others to do the same. Community workshops will build photography skills and inspiration encouraging local people to take and submit photos for inclusion in a digital gallery and outdoor projection planned for later this Autumn. The project also plans to discover old archive images of the Mendip Hills and encourage people to take modern photos in the same locations to look at how the landscape has changed over time.



Scott O'Hara, CEO of Seed says "The images will be brought together to transform Cheddar Gorge into a digital gallery through outdoor projections onto rock faces. This will be a spectacular celebration that showcases this wonderful landscape in a new and creative way, alongside the creativity of local people".

It is hoped that through the project local people will find a greater understanding and appreciation of the exceptional Mendip Hills landscape, and that new visitors from more urban local communities will be tempted to enjoy the art and nature of the hills.

For more information about the project and to join a workshop, please visit www.seedsedgemoor.com/activities/momentsonmendip. If you have old images of the Mendip Hills that you'd like to share with the project, perhaps of a special place or celebrating a special moment in time, please contact tim@mendiphillsaonb.org.uk.

IT WILL SOON BE SPRING – AND FIRST UP ARE TWO DATES IN MARCH

(read this page of the newsletter first so you don't miss the dates)

Tuesday 28th March 2023. A Society Guided Walk

Meet at 1.30 pm at Priddy Green ST508527 (BA5 3BA), for a moderate circuit of 4.5 miles with three Priddy Drovers and glorious views over Priddy Nine Barrows. There are some stiles. No need to book. Leader: Richard Frost, for information call **01275 472797 & 07745 834513**.



The route along Pelting Drove and Dursdon Drove follows part of the West Mendip Way crossing the long distance route, the Monarch's Way.

Priddy Nine Barrows is a site of archaeological importance and a protected Scheduled Monument. They are a group of nine Bronze Age round barrows, seven occurring in a broadly linear arrangement, with two further mounds 150 yards to the north. Round barrow cemeteries date to the Bronze Age (2000-700 BC).

WHAT THE ROMAN ARMY GOT UP TO IN MENDIP (After the invasion of AD43)

A talk in Priddy Village Hall on **Wednesday 29th March 2023 at 2pm** By a Roman soldier (aka John Smith)

**“An afternoon lecture exploring the Roman Army
and their role on Mendip and in forming Roman Britain” by John Smith**



John Smith, an Archaeologist & military historian will explore archaeological evidence of Roman military equipment and sites and how this translates into creating a picture of the Roman Soldier. He will cover the living conditions, food & drink and their military operations, linking those on Mendip to the overall objectives of the Roman army in South-West England; also discussing the roads, forts and other rarely stated features - the legacy of the Roman Army.

John Smith is an Archaeologist, who uses “Living History” to link the People to the archaeological evidence that they left.

His commitment to Archaeology started in 1971, participating in excavations, that covered sites from the Iron Age to W.W.2.

He is still working in the Roman Heritage Sector at Ilchester heritage centre and Rockbourne Roman Villa and was Curator of Bignor Roman Villa.”

No need to book for this talk.

Members free – visitors £3.00 to include refreshments
Information from Richard on **01275 472797 & 07745 834513** or richardfrost608@gmail.com

AND IN THE FOLLOWING MONTHS WE HAVE:

Friday 28th April 2023

A walk with Richard Ivens: Winscombe to Wavering Down

Meet at 2pm (we are now on summer time, you see) in Winscombe car park behind the Woodborough Inn, (grid ref. ST 422576; BS25 1HA). Approximately 5 miles, moderate, with a steep ascent. Contact: Richard on **01275 852786** for information. No need to book.



Tuesday 16th May 2023

The Presidents' Guided Walk 2023



A guided walk with Les Davies on his own territory; to visit his very own wood – Fox Wood. This is at the top end of Mascalls Wood, Cheddar, which is one of the few ancient woodlands, belonging to Somerset Wildlife Trust, established here for at least several hundred years.

Meeting at 2.30pm : the walk starts from the car park, (privately owned) up Lippiat lane. Grid Ref. 464 534, Sat Nav BS27 3QP, What Three words: “incursion, ambushed, cute”

The charge is all day for £5.00. Les will meet you there.

Alternatively park else where in Cheddar and make your way to the start for 2.30pm. Moderate, with a steep gradient climbing

towards Mascall's wood, distance around 3.7 miles. Above – the bluebells in Fox Wood in spring.

There will be a maximum of 15 places on this walk, to book a place ring **01275 874284** or

email judith.tranter1@btinternet.com

Walk approx..2.5hrs hrs.

Tuesday 13th June 2023

A Walk round the Coronation Meadow of Chancellor's Farm



A repeat of this very popular visit with Manager Kate Lawrence, to see how traditional breeds of livestock are used to manage the wildflower meadows the farm is so famous for; therefore – obviously **NO DOGS** please.

Meet at 2.30pm – there is limited parking space so please car share if possible. There is a maximum of 20 places on this walk , please book by ringing **01275 874284** or email judith.tranter1@btinternet.com

Time to Stand and Stare

Have you seen these magnificent beasts on Blackdown Common or even standing their ground in Burrington Combe on occasions? The Red Pols. Photo Judith Tranter.

Directions to the farm will be given once a place is booked.

THIS YEAR 2023, SO FAR; SOME HEDGES ARE LAID; SOME QUESTIONS ARE ANSWERED; AND SOME TREES ARE WASSAILED

Tania's Wood hedging days. In January, over two days, Tina and Chris, our two qualified hedging tutors, helped ten very brave enthusiastic environmentalists to achieve a superb laid hedge from a tangled mass of high fully grown trees, spikey blackthorn bushes, entwined with fierce healthy brambles, which obviously hadn't seen the light of a saw, hatchet or axe in possibly decades. They were ably aided and abetted by several volunteers who cleared and dragged and cut up all the vegetation resulting from the operation, right out of the way so that work could continue on the hedge. And there was mountains of it – this was a 'veteran hedge', but it will now regenerate from the bottom and become a worthy stockproof part of our boundaries. The hedgers can now be called 'improvers' and NOT beginners.



Photos. L by Elaine Weaver – trees grow into each other and refuse to be parted; By J Tranter. C – so they have to be forced to; R - Beth & Elaine pile the brash high; Below, a well finished hedge.



Something Of Everything Quiz – Friday 27th January. Our long awaited quiz really did happen in January, and we thank Les and Sue very much for sticking with it and being such genial Quizmasters. We had a fair few teams of people who knew quite a few things about a great many subjects between them. But by a slender margin the 'Mendip Times' team claimed victory; I have to add though, that they were supplemented by two Society individual members allocated to them who contributed greatly to the outcome, we are told. Check out the photograph of the winners in 'The Presidents View' on page 14. This appeared in the March Mendip Times and we are told that it is only the second time ever that the Editor of such an august periodical has appeared in his own magazine! Finally – thanks to the landlady of the 'Wellsway' and her team for the warmth and sustenance of the evening.



Burrington Wassail. Friday 3rd February. Such is the popularity of Wassailing- the Master of Ceremonies', also known as our President, was unable to perform our ceremony until the beginning of February – and then was prevented from getting to us on the night. See page 14 again. However, re-organised, we welcomed the Barley Rye choir and quite a few visitors for whom this was their first Wassail, into a great atmosphere, with mulled apple juice to warm us up, and apple cake to eat – and to choose the Wassail Queen of course. Joy Bristow (right) a member of the choir receiving the congratulations from Richard Frost – who gallantly stepped into the breach as Master of Ceremonies. Then everyone joined in the procession, led by the singing Barley Rye, to the orchard, where with a lot of noise and exhortations the trees were fed cider and wished "good health" for the coming harvest. Everyone then repaired to the village hall where cider mulled by Tina, along with more cake and bread and cheese awaited them, with warm apple squash for the children.





We were very pleased to welcome two families with small children, whose first time it was (7 children) and one, the Race Family who had already notched up twelve wassails this year and still had their own little orchard, planted a few years ago, to do. They feel it is important to support the growth and importance of orchards, along with all the culture and customs which are attached to them

L: This is Samuel who is five years old; at his first wassail, "accompanying" The Barley Rye Choir, on his accordion.

R. All dressed up for the wassail: Lena on the left and Lucas to the right.

With many thanks to Les Davies for getting us fixed up with the apple juice and the cider and to everyone who came, and to Barley Rye for their singing and renowned Mummers play. Thank you all – see you next year!



ED: if you have an orchard that you would like wassailed please get in touch with us, a bit of parking for cars would be a bonus.

Wrington and Burrington Hedging Society: 191st Annual Hedging Competition.

On Saturday 11th March we set up our display stand at the Stepstones Farm, Half Yard, Wrington to publicise our Small Grants Scheme, through which we were sponsoring the beginners class in this year's competition.

Left – the beginners stretch of hedge as it was today during the hedging work going on and right – planted in 1984/5 by Nick Green, Farms Manager for Alvis Bros Ltd, our speaker at our April AGM.



Looking at what our hedgers achieved in Tania's Wood this January we would certainly think that they are ready to be entering the world of competition hedging themselves. So we will be looking forward to the Mendip Ploughing Society's event in the autumn.

And finally, the finished hedges; who would have believed that all that awkward hedge above could be tamed into these perfect stock-proof hedges, below, laid in the North Somerset style. And the results?

On the left holding the Stuart Ford Perpetual Cup is Steve McCulloch, from Devon he won the Championship Class. On the right, 'resting on his laurels' is Rob Sturmeay, also from Devon; he won the Open class, with the Fountain Forestry Silver Jubilee Cup. As Tina, as Chairman of the Wrington & Burrington Society when presenting the winners with their cups said, "What is this -all our cups going out of County!!".

Winners photos: Kirsty Jane Sturmeay



**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, FRIDAY APRIL 14TH 2023 to be held in the
St. James's Church Hall, Winscombe, OPEN 2pm for 2.30pm start.**

AGENDA – Welcome by Les Davies MBE Mendip Society President

1. Minutes of the previous meeting on April 21st 2022. – 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 2022. Copies of the income and expenditure account 2022 will be available to members at the meeting, and on request from the Treasurer otherwise.
4. Other Relevant Reports – Membership, the website, Rights of Way, and Walks & Talks Organiser, and for the two Society Reserves. 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) Other members of the Management Committee. All are willing to stand again. Any new nominations for the committee must be made in writing and given or sent to the Secretary before the meeting. We also remember here our fellow Trustee, Clive Constance, who passed away at the end of last year.
6. A.O.B. from the Chair or from the floor. The date of the Annual General Meeting 2024
7. TEA AND CAKE followed by our 'After Meeting Talk'



**'SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE
A FIFTY YEAR STORY OF FOOD, FARMING AND THE ENVIRONMENT'
With Nick Green, Farms' Director for Alvis Bros.Ltd**

Nick's 'daytime job' is Farm Operations Director for Alvis Bros. Having started off as 'the boy' in 1982 on one of the dairy farms he is now responsible for the business' three dairy farms, beef, arable, pig and contracting enterprises and looks after the non farming estate as well. Nick is passionate about British food and farming and as well as the business, he is involved with a number of local and national farming charities, including as a Trustee of the very local 'Farmlink'

Financial Report for the year ending December 31st 2022

A brief overview of the Income and Expenditure Account for the year ended 31st December 2022
The Mendip Society had a Surplus of £75.62 (2021 a surplus of £12,460.32 including a £20,000 legacy) and after payments from the heritage fund totalling £5,172.24 (2021 £3,890.00)
The income of the society was higher than in 2021 excluding that years legacy but is still not yet back to pre Covid levels.
The outgoings for 2022 were similar to those in 2021 but 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.
- Walk costs are lower due to lack of leaders, making it imposable to start a weekly walking program. The Credit is caused by the actual cost of expenditure, estimated in 2021 accounts being lower.
- The increase in talks/events costs, is due to the increase in activities organised during the year. The Small Grants made, were higher than in 2021, this was because the society received more requests for grants.
- The Society's Accounts show it to be in a good position, although its restart of normal activities after Covid has been slower than hoped for, due to lack of Volunteers.

Marilyn Cattell – Treasurer — copies of these accounts will be available at the meeting.

Membership Report for 2022/2023

As at March the membership stands at 308; this includes 50 members whose renewals are outstanding If there is a reminder inserted into your copy please renew promptly as membership expires at the end of March.

2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2022	2023
384	382	366	390	385	366	351	308

The decline in numbers is becoming serious and the Society will not be able to continue in its current form unless we recruit new members. The pressures on the area from development, traffic, fly tipping etc. are real and our voice carries weight only if we have a sizeable membership. Recommendation by word of mouth is valuable 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 Secretary.**

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 means for keeping people up to date with events and news about the Society. We try to minimise the number of emails we send to members (I know that I get fed up with organisations that send me too many) so please look at the website regularly, say once a week. If you have anything you would like included or ideas of how it might be improved please contact Peter at webmaster@themendipsociety.org.uk.

The Mendip Society Nature Reserves in 2022

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 receive 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 if any member knows the whereabouts of a mature tree please get in touch with me.

Slader's Leigh Meadow. Again, a very mixed bag of weather throughout the year, with the spring being wet, the ground muddy and the first work day was not until April, although Tina Bath ran a hedging training day in January, laying the hedge behind the pond at the lower end of the meadow for the first time since it was last done just before the pond was constructed, well over 10 years ago. The spring flowers, thanks to the thorough cutting of the previous year were beautiful – and prolific, and several foragers found the beds of wild garlic (for soups?).

The students from Sidcot School again visited us for a month on their environmental studies afternoon, planting the 2 anniversary trees we had for the meadow. One visit had to be cancelled because of extremely high storm winds, we didn't lose any more trees this time though. In the autumn they came again, this time, they learnt how to rake up and roll-up to pitchfork away cut grass, and also to use tools to coppice some hazel trees which were depriving their planted oak of light.

We had to call on the services of our President again this year for one session of cutting, as after one day of scything we realised we just wouldn't manage to clear it, so prolifically and high it had grown this year. We have a reducing number of scythers we can call on – some of those who trained with us in 2008 from different conservation groups have gone back to motorised cutting which is a great shame. But I have to also admit that we were pleased to get the loan of Les' older Allen Scythe, rightly called by him 'The Beast' owing to its wayward run-a-way habits. We gave it a bit of TLC and finished the meadow and then we also used it in Tania's Wood car park field.

The owl and dormice boxes were checked again by Bristol Water's Environmental Team and also a Bat survey recording camera was left for a while by a University student and we were amazed at how many species were recorded foraging up and down the hedgerows. Walkers, runners and cyclists continued to use it all through the winter period, many on a daily basis, still seeming to appreciate its peace and quiet and 'serenity' in the cold and wet.

Tania's Wood, Ubley. After a hedge laying training day, led by Tina, which was a much finer day than that for the one in the meadow, there were several work days when the rampant growth all over the reserve had to be cut and cleared away, especially as the Forest School had been able to time-table a half term of weekly visits from the end of April. It was great to see them enjoying the wood and using it for their activities.

This is the aim of the Society – to enable more people to visit and enjoy the wood, with its added historical attraction – the Deer Bank, being one of the few remaining Medieval features in any recognisable form, in the South-West. Our ambition is to create a permissible circular footpath inside the wood, together with explanation boards. This will be a big undertaking considering the rate of growth of all the under-vegetation threatening to swamp any path.

We also continued to bulk up hedges laid in previous years with whips supplied by 'I Dig Trees' through 'The Conservation Trust', freely given, for which we are very grateful. At the same time, during the couple of violent storms we experienced during the year, there have been a small number of cherry trees uprooted and sprawled into the canopy of surrounding trees. They are very shallow rooting and cannot withstand the huge gusts that now seem to come as a feature of storms; they have to be made safe by getting them down to ground level.

In one of the winter storms, the heavy duty tarpaulin we had slung amongst the circle of pine trees which the Forest School use as their base, shredded itself to pieces. It was used by ourselves on work days and the children when the weather was wet. We have come up with another solution – a shelter built in such a way that it can be dismantled and moved to a new location if necessary, See the article on p 3.

In the autumn a large number of seeds were collected from the two ancient oak trees which this year were absolutely laden, also many hawthorn berries and field maple wings, but hardly any hazel nuts, and only a very few 'conkers' from the couple of horse chestnut trees we have. All were taken to be over-wintered by 'Bleadon Trees', a small tree nursery to which we gave a grant in 2022 to produce a 'Seed Gathers Guide'. Numbers are recorded and we get back half the potted on seedlings when safely growing, to plant in our own reserve.



They have a very nice website <https://www.bleadontrees.co.uk/> so do take a look. Here is the front cover of their Guide.

Rights of Way Officers Report 2022

For some reason, this year has been very quiet on the rights of way front; we have only been consulted on three potential rights of way diversion orders:-

Ashwick Parish. Diversion of footpath SM 1/60 at Harridge Wood, Nettlebridge (Oakhill). The existing line of path is very steep and difficult to use. In the interests of public safety, a rather longer, but easier, route is proposed, this being already in use by many walkers. No objection raised.

Ditchat Parish. Diversion of footpath SM 6/5 at Wraxall Vineyard, Wraxall. Proposed to divert path through vineyard back on to its original line – shorter and easier to use and a win-win situation for both path users and the vineyard owners. Fully supported.

Street Parish. Diversion of footpaths WS 18/20 and 18/22 through the grounds of Millfield School. The existing route runs very close to boarding house play areas and private bedrooms, making it awkward for walkers and potentially unsafe for students. The shorter and easier route proposed would enable school staff to implement additional measures to protect boarders. Fully supported.

The only other issue of note dealt with concerned a complaint received that footpaths in the vicinity of the former CEGB Structural Test Centre at Tuttors Hill, Cheddar were obstructed as a result of the erection of a house at the Test site (for which planning permission had been granted). We liaised with the Rights of Way Team at Somerset County Council who investigated the situation and advised that, although used by the public, the obstructed track was not the definitive line of path and no offence had, therefore, been committed. County arranged for the clearance of the legal paths to ensure their safe use. Hopefully, this has resolved any problems in the area.

It will be interesting to see whether we continue to receive consultations following the major re-organisation of local government in Somerset as from 1st April, 2023. Time will tell!

Dave + Margaret Parker. Rights of Way Officers.

Planning in Somerset – from our planning scrutiniser for Sedgemoor District.

Sedgemoor District Council will cease to exist on 1 April 2023.

Thereafter planning applications will be dealt with by Somerset County Council.

However, in practice, Sedgemoor District Council's Local Plan will be the reference document until Somerset County Council has put in place a new county wide Local Plan. Accordingly, Somerset County Council has instigated a consultation process for the new Plan with a view to having a Plan in place by 2028.

This is an opportunity for the public to decide whether it wishes to support the urbanisation of the countryside or to preserve the natural beauty of Somerset's countryside. To have your say visit www.somerset.gov.uk, search for current planning consultations and follow instructions. The site will be updated from time to time as the consultation progresses.

Since Sedgemoor District Council's 2011-2032 Local Plan effectively became one of the main planning reference documents, planning permissions have been granted for around 1000 new dwellings and numerous property extensions along or immediately adjacent to the southern slopes of the Mendip Hills, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty between Cheddar and Compton Bishop. On the ground, construction works are progressing in compliance with such planning permissions with approximately half the dwellings and extensions having been completed.

One of the consequences of urban development, is that the infrastructure also requires updating; for example, roads, schools, surgeries and dental practices. You will have your views on whether the relevant Authorities are keeping pace with the expanding local population.

Across the country, tens of thousands of acres of countryside have succumbed to the relentless Government drive to build 300,000 dwellings a year, every year. There are many who consider the destruction of the countryside to be disastrous for natural flora and fauna and a negative step in the fight to reverse climate change. Conversely, there are many who believe provision of habitable accommodation to be a far greater priority.

As noted previously, to give your views on how you think Somerset should be developed, visit www.somerset.gov.uk and search for planning consultations.

Mike Rolfe

Walks & Talks Programme Report – 2022

With the Country slowly emerging from Covid, which played havoc with our usual programme, we struggled on with what we could actually achieve.

Talks:-

We only hosted one at Wells, on the life of Cecil Sharpe, English musician noted for his work as a collector of folk songs, dances and instrumental music. It was a full house with over sixty people attending. Very good.

Quite a few speakers offered to hold a Zoom meeting, but still insisted on a fee which did not involve them in any travel etc. and with no method of a “on the door fee”, we declined them.

Things are looking better for the coming year.

Walks:-

Although it did not feel like it at the time, we were able to have eleven walks throughout the year, thanks to a very reduced group of leaders. Our thanks to those who stepped up and made it happen.



We also had two other walks, with a group celebration of the late Queens' Jubilee event to formalise the Mendip Way. It involved the AONB, the Rotary, and ourselves.

Left – Handing over the baton on the Relay Walk on The Mendip Way walk.

Our other walk was one scheduled into the Mendip Rocks programme.

One other event was the visit to the Leigh Down Stone Circles, which was a success, and one we hope to repeat again in 2023. With the hope of things slowly returning to normal, we hope to have an increase in our activities for 2023, so keep an eye on the website.

If you have an idea for a walk, talk or event, then please notify me and we can bring it to life.

Richard Frost. Walks and talks organiser

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, Judith Tranter and Richard Frost are willing to stand again.
- . Proposed 'election en bloc', plus any new proposals for election to stand received.

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 as well .

You will realise from the list of members standing for election to the Committee that we are an even smaller number than last year, taking on the many roles and tasks needed to run an organisation like the Mendip 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 who is vital to the efficient running of the Society as a whole.

For example – it will be obvious when reading the planning report that we have no member covering the planning applications for any of the area covered by The Mendip Society except for Sedgemoor, long kept a very thorough eye on by Mike Rolfe, to whom we are very indebted. 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 now 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'.

Dew ponds, composting toilets and more. By Mike Harvey

Late last summer, Mid-September in fact, I was asked by the committee for my thoughts on an application made under the Small Grants Scheme run by the Mendip Society, principally because it had been made by a neighbour of mine, Roger White. In truth, although I have been on nodding terms with Roger since I moved to the area, I had never before spent time talking with him in any detail. Wanting to do a “proper job”, I arranged to meet with him to visit and hear all about his vision for land he owns on the edge of the AONB near Churchill, and his plans for its future.

Roger told me he has owned his smallholding for around 45 years, originally purchasing it as a place for the young people, whom he worked with professionally, to camp on for an out-of-town adventure experience. Since retirement this has declined and he now mainly farms some sheep on site, manages the trees, hedgerows and tracks on his land, and generally cares for the area. Over the years, Roger has also built a range of sustainable wooden buildings and facilities,



A meeting at the dew pond. Roger White outlines his vision. Clearly a lot of work to be done to this point.

including a comfortable dwelling that he uses at lambing time and when working on the land.

His application related to the installation of a composting toilet, which was a requirement if he was to have students from Weston College over to help work on the restoration of a particularly fine Dew Pond on one edge of the site. Tina Bath, our Chair and something of an authority on dew ponds had already visited and agreed to get involved, but it is a big project, hence the need for additional help.

I was pleased to report back that I supported his application – and in due course it was approved, but that is just the start of the story.

Longer term, Roger, has been thinking about the future of the land he owns and clearly loves. He has plans to plant yet more woodland and some wildflower meadow areas, including picnic areas and a small car park. On the edge of the site he intends to build a simple timber roundhouse and camping area for young people. Once the dewpond is restored, he intends the composting toilet to be a facility for visitors and those

staying at the roundhouse. His eventual plan is for the whole area to be placed in trust with public access and particular emphasis on young people – particularly those who are “disadvantaged” in some way and those in need of a bit of additional support.

Roger had already spoken to people at Mendip AONB. Also to Weston College and a handful of others who might be able to offer help and support. When I mentioned that the Mendip Society already holds in trust and manages both Tania’s Wood and Slader’s Leigh his eyes lit up at the idea of the Mendip Society becoming involved in his project. It is my hope therefore that his vision for the land might fit very neatly into the society’s aims in the longer term, both being good for the Mendip area in general and encouraging involvement from younger people – something that our aging membership might well see as being highly desirable for the continuation and long-term survival of the society.

READY FOR THE COMING FOREST SCHOOL TERM. BUILT BY FOREST SCHOOL DADS



A joint project between the School and the Society, for use by both of us, it has been part funded by ourselves with a very generous donation of timber to the value of £300 by **Somerlap Fencing**, for which we are very grateful. The shelter has a tarpaulin roof, battened down against the winds, but at the moment the sides are open.

We have suggested that we could make lightweight panel fencing which can be fixed or taken off as required as our contribution to the construction, therefore we will be trying our hand at weaving wattle style panels to fit into the lower half of each side to provide protection against the wind and rain.

That is the plan anyway! We have the materials in the wood – if anyone would like to join us on a wattle fencing day please contact Judith on **01275 874284**. Take a look at this U tube video also to get the idea. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZZJU953eOG8> More on

the building of the shelter, together with the children’s ideas for an ‘house name sign’ and a ‘grand opening’ ceremony in the next issue of the newsletter. Judith Tranter – Manager of Tania’s Wood

KEEPING THE STARFISH ALIVE... by Mike Harvey

Pardon?... What does that have to do with Mendip?

OK, deliberately enigmatic, some of you might have guessed, but for the rest here's an explanation – of sorts.

Those paying close attention will possibly remember that one of my first articles for the newsletter featured a book by my old headmaster, Donald Brown. Don was also a Society member, volunteer Ranger, local historian and walk leader before age and ill-health curtailed his activities. His speciality was the wide range of top-secret activities carried out on Mendip during WW2. In particular he devised a walk that took in the remains of the so-called **Special Fires (SF = StarFish – code, see?)** that were laid out on Blackdown as a decoy for bombers approaching Bristol.

Following Don's retirement from leading this walk, Mike Chipperfield, "Chips" to many of us, another volunteer Ranger took over the reins, but he too now feels the time is right to hand over responsibility.

"OK" said the committee, "but who is going to run the walk now?" ... Enter yours truly, full of enthusiasm for local history, sort of familiar with the story – and not too quick at ducking! Don is sadly no longer with us, but Chips has been generous in offering up his notes and other materials, and has agreed to take me over the route one last time so I can check my facts and locations before being let loose on an unsuspecting public.



● **Special Interest Walk:** In a peaceful Mendip setting, Don Brown takes members of the Mendip Society and visitors from the Gower Society back to the war years when Mendip was offered up as a target for the German bombers.
Photo: Brendon Cottrell

A photograph lifted from a newsletter article about the original walk, with Don Brown (second from right) in charge.

So watch this space... Once preparations are complete, I will be announcing, either in the next newsletter or on the website / social media etc., a date to meet up and discover the fascinating remains of our very own deception plan, designed to keep bombs from falling on our cities & key infrastructure during WW2.

BOOK CORNER by Mike Harvey : DEEPEST SOMERSET

The people, the places and the roots of a unique community.

By Fanny Charles and Gay Pirrie-Weir



OK, I know Somerset is widening the brief a little, but Mendip is wholly within Somerset – proper, traditional Somerset that is, so I thought it counted.

This is the third book in the "Deepest" series, Wiltshire and Dorset having preceded it.

Interestingly, they too were the story of:

"The people, the places and the roots of a unique community!"

To be fair, I suppose every community is unique to some degree, but this strapline did initially hit me as a bit of a cheap "hook" to attract potential buyers. That said, I found the book to be a very interesting series of short articles about people, places and general goings

on in and around our county. Famous residents, off-grid living, historical curios, food and drink, including a few recipes, the arts... You name it this book has something on the subject. It even includes a foreword by HRH, then The Prince of Wales, now King Charles III.

Obviously with so much to cover, nothing is covered in depth, but this does not stop Deepest Somerset from being an engaging and interesting coffee table book. Mine has taken up residence and is becoming well-thumbed, never failing to offer up some little nugget about our home county.

To order Deepest Somerset send an email to info@deepestbooks.co.uk or check out their website at www.deepestbooks.co.uk to find a list of local stockists. While there you can also check out the list of good causes that stand to benefit from the proceeds, so all in all, a good thing all around.

And now, a request dear reader.

We would like, very much to feature and promote local publications, big and small, to a wider audience. We are aware that many villages and groups have produced their own guide books, local histories and general interest books, leaflets etc. Please, if you know of anything in your community that fits this description – or even comes close in some way, do get in touch or ask the authors to do so. We would love to hear from them. What's more, we promise to be gentle. This is not the place to stomp roughshod over someone else's efforts, all we want to do is help our membership discover more about the area we all love.



A PRESIDENTS' VIEW

Dear all,

I feel we are finally turning the corner from winter into spring, but as every 'mendiper' knows - if there is snow to be had, it's often in March.

Thank you to all of those who came to the quiz evening. Not too 'Mendipy' this time, but so sorry about the 'where's it to' section - when we found all the answers were below the pictures! Also a special thanks to Sue and Peter Gearing who worked on the questions together with

grand daughter Kitty who came up with the people and gender change section. The *Mendip Times* team went off with the bottles of Emily Elizabeths apple juice this time, but I hope everyone had a good time.

Also thanks to those who stepped up at short notice to carry out the Wassail at Burrington. Richard Frost carried out the Master of Ceremony duties but again it was thanks to Sue Gearing that they could all get into the orchards... She could remember the combination on the gate lock. As always Tina was there leading from the front and provided some much needed food to go with the cider and apple juice. I can now report that my 'Landy' has recovered from the wheel bearing collapse it suffered but is no doubt considering what to inflict upon me next.



When the the sun shines we all start feeling a bit better and want to get out and about.

I notice that Richard Ivens had a walk around Harptree Coombe and Smitham Chimney. There's a lot of fascinating history in that part of Mendip and it is one of the walks that Sue and I have written for a new book called '*Secrets of the Hill*'. We've written it for the Mendip Hills AONB and it is aimed at the younger first time explorers market, which is why it should appeal so much to you all!

Keep your eyes open as it should be out this spring.

Yet more to come as we try and arrange another film evening with a showing of the 'Hannah Moore' film by a Bristol based company. Having seen it there is much to commend it, especially as it is an amateur dramatics production with lots of local people. *More information to follow.*



I'm now going to shut up and let some others do the talking, but not before I attach my spring photo of a sneaky peek through the gate at Langford Court... Floral display or what!! You do realise I have forgone the honour of being front cover by doing this. ***Kindest regards to you all. - Les***



Left: is a photograph taken by Peter Janes of a lane above Ubley, at grid ref ST520571, with a very fine restored dry stone wall on one side and a splendid avenue of beech trees on the other. Mike Harvey (who was sent this picture) said "I am so pleased with the photographs I had sent me for this newsletter, I was spoilt for choice. However, I will be keeping them all safely- perhaps we could do a special photographic edition or use them in some other way?". So - if you have been a member since the start of the 2000's you will remember our own cards & notelets, (& tea towel!) produced after Sue Gearing's Society photo competition. Time for another cards issue - to publicise the Society? Is there a member willing to volunteer to take on such a project - all photos supplied of course - we will have them, if you keep sending them in to Mike!! photos@themendipsociety.org.uk

A SAD OCCASION FOR THE WHOLE SOCIETY

It is with much personal sadness that I have to announce the passing of Paul Harley, a friend and past President of the Society. One who did so much for the Society, including for our flagship reserve in its early years, Slader's Leigh, his favourite place of all. During Paul's time on the committee and right up to the end of last year, one person, who was closely involved with all the technical practicalities of running a charity like ours, is Jamie Brown, who knew Paul extremely well. He now writes about his friend Paul for us. **Judith Tranter**

Paul Edward Harley 1940 – 2022

Former Chairman and then Vice President of the Mendip Society has passed away peacefully at home at the age of 82.

Paul Harley was born in London in 1940. As a young teen he was a very keen cyclist and often cycled between London and Dorset. By 1959 he was farming and he met Ann, his future wife in Blandford Forum that year; and they moved to Winscombe in 1965

During the late 60's he suffered a serious knee injury in a motor accident and was never able to return to farming although he continued in the agricultural industry but in a less hands on way., working for a number of agricultural merchants and wholesalers.

In the late 80's he took up sailing and along with friends spent much time on the water, one of his favourite locations being the area around Dartmouth, sailing to Europe on many occasions.

By the early 90's Paul's health began to deteriorate until by the mid 90's he was fitted with a pacemaker, then having a number of replacement devices over the years until in 2022 he was fitted with a pioneering bullet sized device implanted within the heart itself.

Paul had many hobbies over the years. He enjoyed photography and he had a good selection of cameras and equipment; he also very much enjoyed making and flying model aircraft.

In his later years he was an avid television and movie viewer; one of his favourites was science fiction and he always knew the latest releases. He also enjoyed a wide range of music but Jazz was one of his favourite music choices.

Paul had a great love of dogs especially the larger breeds, owning several Briards and from the mid 90's he had a number of Old English Sheepdogs, often being seen on the Strawberry Line walking them.

'Cromwell', an Old English Sheep Dog was his last dog who was a favourite and also came with the challenge of being totally deaf. He was a huge sports fan across the board with rugby and cricket his favourites, and he also enjoyed cooking and entertaining; and would make new dishes for his friends to try, always carefully matching the food with an appropriate variety of wines

He was very computer savvy and spent many hours in his office sending and receiving emails, editing and compiling photographic projects from which the Mendip Society benefited greatly and generally helping others if they had computer issues. As well as The Mendip Society Paul was involved with the South Somerset and Axbridge Strawberry Line Group and was its chairman 2012/13.

Paul was a larger-than-life character, a very dear friend, very adamant in what he believed and not afraid of letting his feelings be known. He will be much missed. **Jamie Brown**



As Jamie said, Paul was very fond, and proud, of Slader's Leigh being involved in its designation as a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) in July 2005. He loved wild flowers and didn't like to see any forced into foreign things such as wreaths. So Ann, his wife, had a 'hedgerow ' spray' made for the service to celebrate his life on Tuesday 3rd January. It was on display here afterwards at the Woodborough Inn, Winscombe, and comprises the species of wild flowers we have in the meadow and the surrounding hedges. Taken by Jamie Brown.

The Society Back Page

PAUL HARLEY TO THE RESCUE! by Judith Tranter

Reading our previous page, you will know that we have lost a great friend of the Society in Paul Harley, who was Chairman when I joined at the very turn of this century. He lived just across the road from the Strawberry Line and lost no time in making sure I knew about Slader's Leigh- I didn't need much persuading, it was managed then by David Addison and I went on one of David's famous Bank Holiday walks and I remember thinking 'What a magical place'. To cut a long story short, when David retired in 2002 and then moved to Stanford in 2004, and Richard Bull asked me to become Slader's Leigh's manager – somehow I did.

When David's wife Pat sadly died he gave the Society a very generous donation for a seat for the reserve in her memory. We commissioned a seat from 'Somerset Woodworking', a charity which collected surplus timber from everywhere they could and then taught unemployed people the skills needed to make items for sale. They made the amazing seat below, (I asked for those in wheelchairs to be able to sit at the same height as their walking friends). It was made from oak and from teak rescued from the Weston burnt down pier, and was so heavy it needed 8 strong men to carry it from the Strawberry Line into its place under the silver birch trees, looking towards the top of the meadow.

It was dedicated to both Pat and David Addison, carved across the top of the back support; it has been extremely popular with so many visitors, it got decidedly battered looking, and two years ago suffered the final ignominy of having the back broken off (we can only surmise) by a group of people sitting on the back and rocking. It is now in the state shown in the second picture, below.



For Pauls' Memorial Service, Ann, his wife, requested Pauls' wish for no flowers, but any donations in Pauls' memory to go to The Mendip Society. We have received a cheque just before we went to print of this newsletter for £451.50

Ann and I have talked about what Paul would like it to be spent on and we both agree, to repair the seat in Slader's Leigh.

So that is what we will do, and thank you to everyone who donated in memory of Paul - the seat will be re-dedicated to both Pat & David Addison and Paul Harley.



"IN FOND MEMORY OF DOROTHY SAGE, A LOVER OF THE MENDIPS AND A REGULAR WALKER IN HER YOUNGER DAYS"

We have received another donation of £20 from Mrs Janet Cuff in memory of her great friend Dorothy Sage; Janet writes

"After 69 years of friendship she leaves a big gap in my life and there will never be another friend like her".

We thank you very much Janet, and with your agreement we would like to add it to the fund for the restoration of the seat in Sladers Leigh, a meadow enjoyed by so many walkers on Mendip. Judith Tranter – Slader's Leigh Manager

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

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