

# Mendip



The Newsletter of The Mendip Society

Issue No. 158 • March 2020

**"I JUST STOOD THERE WITH THE OTHERS AND THOUGHT – WE ARE THE FIRST PEOPLE TO EVER SEE THIS"**



A cave, known as the Frozen Deep, was discovered by Martin Grass and his team in 2012, after four years of further exploration off the Reservoir Hole, near Cheddar, first discovered in the 1960s. "We had been digging a small tunnel, on our hands and knees, since 2008 and were on the verge of calling it a day! "As we entered, our lights showed us huge white stalagmites about 16 feet high, there were huge stalactites as well, looking like they were made of ice, which is why we called it the Frozen Deep." see page 3

## THE SOCIETY WASSAIL, JANUARY 2020 by R. Frost

This year's event was held in Fry's Lane Orchard, Burrington, mild and dry weather making for a pleasant authentic evening amongst the apple trees. Organiser and Master of Ceremonies, Les Davies led us into the orchard from the Village Hall, accompanied by the appropriate musical songs and music provided by the Community Choir of Barley Rye. The chosen tree was adorned with lights and the night air was rent by an unholy racket created by all fifty plus attendees in an effort to banish the evil spirits thus ensuring a decent harvest for the forthcoming year. Extra noise was made by a youthful Sam Gearing with a gun, much to his (and our) enjoyment.



Chosen at random, Wassail Queen Phoebe, 12, carried out her duties with great care and attention, pouring cider around the base of the tree; I have no doubt all this will work as it should for the coming year's harvest.

The motley crowd returned to the hall to listen and join in with gusto to the well known Wassail songs of Barley Rye. To round off the evening we enjoyed a hot supper of seasonal curry, fragrant rice and flatbreads which was cooked for us by Sonya, the Vegetable Diva, and owner of the orchard which we had just Wassailed.

With many thanks to our President, Les Davies and Barley Rye for making this a memorable evening. Photo by Steve Eggington

## In this issue

**Read about: events coming up to enjoy; John Muir, inventor of National Parks; the new happenings in our own AONB; The Great British Spring Clean; the Curse of fly tipping and the life of our two Nature Reserves.**

*The views and opinions of our contributors are not necessarily those of The Mendip Society.*

*Photos, articles (signed) and anything else of interest are always welcome for the newsletter and make for a more varied issue, plus your feedback is valued and appreciated. We will withhold your name if asked to.*

### ABOUT THE AGM

*Keep an eye on the Society website, Face Book page, and your e-mails for any updates about the AGM on March 27th in Priddy.*

*The middle four pages of this newsletter are to pull out and take to the meeting; the agenda also has details of the parking arrangements of the hall on Priddy Green.*

## WE HAVE ENJOYED

### WEDNESDAY 6<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER – “THE FUTURE OF THE MENDIP HILLS AREA of OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY” A talk by its Manager, Jim Hardcastle.

*This report is in the form of a blog posted by Karen Andrews aka Botany Karen; she has very kindly allowed us to post it in our newsletter too. This is the link to her blog on line <https://botanykaren.net/tag/mendip-society/>*

Against the backdrop of the Glover Report, the Mendip Hills AONB is looking to the future. Jim Hardcastle reviewed the AONB's current state in a presentation to the Mendip Society in Wells. Les Davies, President of the Mendip Society and Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society introduced Jim Hardcastle and moderated a lively question and answer session at the end.

Jim Hardcastle set out to expose current concerns and perceptions. He described the AONB as a veil over the top of the Mendip Hills. The weather is frequently wet and windy on top. The views are extraordinary whether your vantage point is looking up at the hills or out from the hills. The Mendip Hills AONB is an island surrounded by dense housing, with increasing pressure for more development close by. The presentation covered a lot of ground. Ambitions are high; resources are low. The AONB team has just 5 staff and relies heavily on the welcome and wonderful support of around 100 volunteers. Getting the support of the public is vital too.

#### Jim's 8 Ways in which the public can help Mendip AONB

1. Cover outside lights to shine downwards – light pollution is a problem for birds and bats. There are concerns about light pollution from Bristol Airport expansion, (STOP PRESS – now thankfully averted for the moment), Cheddar (disproportionate to size) and Wells.
2. Know about your scheduled monuments and help to protect them.
3. Maintain geological features – clear Cotoneaster and prevent other invasive garden escapes.
4. Keep soil in fields – avoid ploughing at the wrong time of year.  
Plant native oaks and beech on northern slopes or in your own garden. Get involved in community planting schemes. There are free trees available (**Woodland Trust: Free trees for schools and communities**) Oak supports 800 species and Beech 600 species. Go native!
5. Grassland on south-facing slopes – help create nesting sites for birds, bats and habitats for bugs.
6. Dry stone walls – put a stone back. Help reduce the slow degradation.
7. Welcome visitors and pass on news. Get more people to come. Be inclusive.
8. Mendip Hills AONB promotes the area for active sports: cycling, mountain biking, caving, running, walking and rock climbing. Enjoy them.

*Credit - text & photo Karen Andrews (read **The Glover Report**)*



### THURSDAY 28<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER – “A HISTORY OF KNITTING PATTERNS” AN ILLUSTRATED TALK by SARAH HARRIS of ‘The Spinning Weal’ in Clevedon.

Unfortunately Sarah did herself a mischief on her farm the day before this talk and was unable to walk or even stand and so had to cancel her visit. We are happy to report that she has recovered and has promised to do the talk for us in the near future.

Also on Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> Danielle Schreve, our Gully Cave Professor, gave a talk in Wells; I had the details to put in the newsletter p13 but completely failed to include them for which I apologise greatly. However now read her item on page 13.

### TUESDAY 10<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER – “THE INVENTOR OF NATIONAL PARKS – WHO WAS JOHN MUIR?” AN ILLUSTRATED TALK BY TERRY GIFFORD

Known as the father of the American Conservation Movement, John Muir never lost his Scottish accent. His idea for a series of National Parks is said to be America's gift to the world, so why the opposition to them in Scotland by The John Muir Trust? How is Muir's ecological philosophy from the 19th century relevant to landscape issues in 21st century? What can now be seen as John Muir's errors from our modern perspective?



Terry's talk was based upon having recently written Introductions to eight of Muir's books published cheaply as ebooks by Vertebrate Books, having previously edited 'The complete Works of John Muir'. This talk by a world authority on the Scot who became known as America's wilderness sage, perfectly complimented that by Jim Hardcastle on the Future of our own Mendip Hills AONB in the previous November.

Terry has penned us an article on page 6 expanding on his talk.



**TUESDAY 14<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2020**

**“THE WORLD OF ROCK CLIMBING PHOTOGRAPHY”**

**by Ian Smith, introduced by Terry Gifford.**

Ian Smith, the rock-climbing photographer and editor of climbing guidebooks to the Southwest, was the third guest of Terry Gifford to be tempted down from Sheffield to talk to the Society. Ian followed Dolores Long on the Spanish Civil War and John Driskell on his 1967 drive and walk to Everest base camp featured in his book *Everest the Old Way*.

Ian began by talking about the alternative techniques for getting good pictures, including hanging from ropes beside his subject in action. His early black and white pictures brought out the rock textures and architecture, whilst his colour photographs often involved dressing the climber with spare gear from his own rucksack. It turned out that yellow trousers were a key to selling his pictures to the climbing magazines. His most internationally purchased shot tellingly included the path to the crag and colourful piles of gear strewn about beneath a very short but photogenic hand traverse on Peak District gritstone. He felt slightly guilty that German and French visiting climbers tempted by his photo in their magazines might be disappointed by the actual climb when they found it. This would not have been the case, of course, for his shot of a climb in our very own popular Mendip climbing venue, Fairy Cave Quarry.



*Rob's Crack at Fairy Cave Quarry, by Ian Smith*

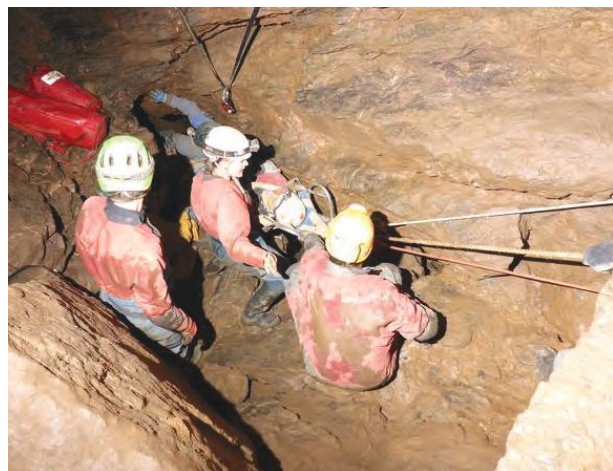
Ian went on to talk about his editing of climbing guidebooks for the Climbers' Club in the Southwest, including his innovative design of a bouldering guide to Dartmoor that required the book to be turned sideways. He made the point that the very first British climbing guidebook which was produced by the Climbers' Club to Lliwedd, inside the Snowdon horseshoe, copies of which now sell for over £100, contained basic elements of description which are unchanged in modern guidebooks. But the role of photography has obviously both increased and spectacularly improved, as Ian's own pictures demonstrated.

This talk attracted a high number of non-members, including at least three members of the Alpine Club, and generated an avalanche of questions from the audience ranging from technical equipment to injuries.

**TUESDAY 25<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2020**

**“CAVING AND CAVE RESCUE” – by Martin Grass, of MENDIP CAVE RESCUE –  
“Cavers rescuing cavers from under the Mendip Hills for over 80 years”**

Caving is classed as a sport which can be dangerous, it is physically demanding at times, with cavers often spending hours crawling on hands and knees along tunnels just wide enough to squeeze through. But, said Martin Grass, our speaker, “This is the only sport left where you can go somewhere nobody else has been before – ever”.



*A rescue from sludge*

The Mendip Hills are an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, but not all the beauty is above ground and Martin, with his huge, high quality collection of cave and caving photographs, showed a mixed

audience of over 60 the visible fascinating proof of this. Mendip Cave Rescue, (MCR) is responsible for rescues from caves and disused stone mines in the Bristol area, Somerset, Wiltshire & Dorset. Acting on behalf of the Police, the team is responsible for all aspects of the operation underground, from marshalling the required cavers, sourcing and deploying specialist equipment through to control and coordination of the rescue. A serious subject well delivered by Martin, with his droll sense of humour and huge reservoir of facts, very enjoyably.





## AND NOW, TO LOOK FORWARD TO –

SATURDAY 21ST MARCH – “DISCO DANCE PARTY” –

AT THE SWAN HOTEL, SADLER ST. WELLS BA5 2RX – from 8pm-11pm

# 60's & 70's Music



You are invited to come and dance the evening away to music from the **60s & 70s** played for us by professional DJ Sam, forget your worries to your favourite musical memories. Tickets are £6 pp, available from Paul Hambleton on 07792 766994 or Gill Davies on 07788 676261. The bar is open until 11pm, and the restaurant serves dinner from 7pm until 9.30pm, (and often later on Saturdays). Gill and Paul want all proceeds to go to the Mendip Society Heritage fund. COME AND HAVE FUN.

FRIDAY 27TH MARCH – “THE MENDIP SOCIETY AGM” 7.30PM PRIDDY VILLAGE HALL

THURSDAY 30TH APRIL – “THE FUGITIVE KING IN THE SOUTH WEST” An illustrated talk by John Price. 2.30pm St. James' Church Hall, Woodborough Rd, Winscombe, BS25 1BA

On 3 September 1651, Oliver Cromwell fought and won the decisive battle at Worcester of the final phase of the English Civil War, as a result of which Charles Stuart, the future King Charles II, became a desperate refugee. His incredibly eventful 43-day escape took him through much of Southern England before he finally found a passage to France from Shoreham, near Brighton. Placing emphasis on the 24 days spent in the South-West, this talk examines his great adventure and how the many surviving locations have been memorialised in the 625-mile walking trail, The Monarch's Way.





John has been walking the Monarch's Way together with 3 friends for 4 years. At 100 miles a year they have covered  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the route; just starting their 5th year they intend to reach the end of the journey on 15th October 2021, which will be exactly 370 years after Charles made good his escape.

Over the years he has been walking, John has done a great deal of research into all aspects of the flight to France and has built a comprehensive and fascinating website. If you want to whet your appetite for the telling of this adventure go to <http://www.john-price.me.uk/KC2/Intro.htm?> (copy and paste). The interactive map above can also be found on the website. Info from Richard 01275 472797

## MONDAY 18TH MAY –

### “SPRING MIGRANTS AT HAM WALL” –

**A WALK ORGANISED BY JUDY NEWBERRY – 9.30am - 12pm**



*A Booming Bittern camouflaged amongst the reeds*

This is a gentle walk led by RSPB staff around the Ham Wall National Nature Reserve (NNR), a nature reserve of rustling reed-beds and glinting open water providing the vital habitat for a wonderful range of birds and other wildlife. We will be able to observe all the changes happening at this vibrant time of year - when bitterns should be booming and warblers warbling! It may well be muddy under foot so come prepared and bring binoculars if possible.

Meet at Ham Wall car park, Meare, Ashcott BA6 9SX (charges for non RSPB members), toilets and hot drinks available. The cost will be £5pp, payable on the day. Numbers are limited and must be booked on our website by pressing the reserve button and leaving a contact number. More details from Judy on 07443639048

## TUESDAY 19TH MAY –

### “A VISIT TO SHEPTON MALLET PRISON”

**FRITHFIELD LANE, SHEPTON MALLET, BA4 5LU at 2pm**

Shepton Mallet prison has a fascinating history – built in 1610, it was the oldest working prison in the UK up until its closure in March 2013. Read all about it ([www.sheptonmalletprison.com/history](http://www.sheptonmalletprison.com/history)) and then join us on a visit for a first hand experience of this Infamous local Victorian Institution. We will be told stories by ex Officers and Guards, of executions and punishments and a "bread & water lifestyle", visiting the various wings, one with the famous 1610 cell.

We will be part of a public tour which is limited to 35 people, and lasts 2 hours, covering approx. 1 mile and about 200 steps overall; there is no wheelchair access. However, if enough of us book, then it can be ours exclusively. The cost of the tour is £16 if you are over 60 (ID may be required!), payable with booking, cash / cheque to organiser. This is Richard Frost 01275 472797 / [chairman@themendipsociety.org.uk](mailto:chairman@themendipsociety.org.uk)

**Please book well beforehand and note the closing date of Friday 8th May**



## THURSDAY 23RD JULY –

### “AND WE COULD PROBABLY VISIT – GULLY CAVE”

We have an invitation to visit the dig in Gully Cave again this year – this date has been provisionally booked for a group max 15, the summer newsletter will be out at the start of July for you check and book up.

## SOMETIME DURING THE SUMMER –

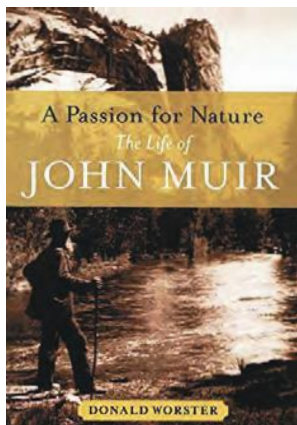
### “AND WE COULD POSSIBLY TRY BODGING”

In Tania's Wood we have a surplus of wood which we are keen to put to good use. If there is enough interest we could possibly arrange for a group to have a 'hands on' introduction to the skill of wood turning on a pole lathe. If this takes your fancy, please contact Judith on 01275 874284 / [judith.tranter1@btinternet.com](mailto:judith.tranter1@btinternet.com)



## THE INVENTOR OF NATIONAL PARKS. BUT WHO WAS JOHN MUIR? by Terry Gifford

Many people may have heard the name of John Muir without really knowing why. Terry Gifford set out to summarise why this nineteenth century Scot (1838-1914) was famous. Taken by his parents from Dunbar to America at the age of eleven to help construct a family farm in the wilds of Wisconsin, Muir became known as the inventor of the modern form of national parks, preserving iconic landscapes and wildlife for future generations to enjoy. By the end of his life he had become the founding father of the American conservation movement, having set up the Sierra Club to involve local people in the protection of Yosemite National Park.



Today, Muir is known for his nature writing which emphasised an ecological vision before the invention of the term by Ernst Haeckel in 1866. Muir's inspirational writing is remarkable for combining science and arts, lobbying and lyricism, empiricism and aesthetics. Muir advanced scientific knowledge but also revered nature in his writing.

With contemporary paintings and more recent photographs Terry outlined Muir's life and gave samples of his enthusiastic writing before considering what, with hindsight, Muir got wrong. Top of the list is the idea that national parks may not be suitable for everywhere. For decades there was resistance to national parks in the Highlands of Scotland. Where would you draw the boundaries? What protection would be offered to places just outside the boundaries? Do 'national' parks make sense on privately owned estates? Secondly Muir wanted to offer environmental protection to the exceptional, but what about the everyday upon which we depend, as we're now realising with losses of pollinators and house sparrows? Actually Muir's notion was about preserving landscapes rather than its wildlife.

And to encourage visitors, who he believed would be enthused as voters, he encouraged cars into Yosemite Valley which remain hard to banish in favour of park and rides. (left)



But more significantly he believed that Americans would vote for environmentalism when they saw the wonders of nature for themselves. Sadly the present elected president has down-graded every environmental agency in government. Finally, Muir's idea that natural decay and destruction produced natural beauty and a 'creation finer and finer' we now know, in the case of his much admired glaciers, is actually nothing but human-induced global heating.

When in 1983 Chris Brasher and friends wanted a name for an organisation that would buy Scottish estates to offer models of conservation to influence neighbours, they formed The John Muir Trust. Terry is member number 453 out of what are now over 10,000 members. The Trust administers The John Muir Award, supporting, in 2020, 150,000 young people in the UK to take responsibility for wild

places in a series of steps to gain the award. This award is being undertaken by young people in our own AONB on our doorstep. So John Muir's name should now be better known in the Mendips and, as Terry suggested, so should his remarkable life and writings

*ED; I've taken the liberty of making some additions to Terry's article namely the two pictures, one of John Muir's books on Nature and cars in Yosemite NP, with this note, which proves his point: "The Yosemite Valley suffered its worst traffic jam*



*ever, on Memorial Day, 1984, with some 7,500 vehicles gridlocked for up to four hours. That year, 2,738,000 people visited Yosemite. Twenty-two years later, in 2016, the number topped 5 million"*

*Plus – he also mentions the John Muir Award being undertaken by young people in the AONB on our doorstep; these are the Young Rangers who are sponsored for their kit this year by ourselves.*

*Here they are on the day they went walling with Malcolm Parsons, who, whilst living up to his awesome volunteering reputation as the current AONB Volunteer of the Year is also a Mendip Society member.*

**A.G.M. MARCH 27TH 2020 at PRIDDY VILLAGE HALL****To be held at 7.30pm prompt****AGENDA - Welcome by Les Davies MBE Mendip Society President**

1. Apologies received. Minutes of the previous meeting on March 29<sup>th</sup> 2019, adoption of Minutes. Matters arising.
2. Chairman's welcome and report (in the newsletter)
3. Annual report and adoption. (not in the newsletter).
4. Reports – Reserves; Membership, Rights of Way, Webmaster, (all in the newsletter)
5. Presentation and adoption of the accounts for 2019 (copies available)
6. Election of Officers – President takes the Chair.  
Nomination and election of the Prime Officers; Election of other members of the Committee, including any new nominations or ratifications.
7. A.O.B. from the Chair or from the floor and date of the AGM 2021  
TEA AND CAKE – donations welcomed.



**And to follow - a talk by our guest speaker, Julie Merrick of Natural England. Julie's PowerPoint presentation, with many beautiful pictures, will be about NE's National Nature Reserves, focussing on the Avalon Marshes landscape in particular.**

If any member wishes to stand for election to the Committee in any capacity including that of Chair, Secretary or Treasurer, then a written proposal must be received by me before the start of the meeting. This must state the name of the proposer and the nominee and be signed by both, the nominee also stating that he or she is willing to stand. It can be previously sent by an email [judith.tranter1@btinternet.com](mailto:judith.tranter1@btinternet.com) or by post (address on page 16) but an original copy must also be available for the records on the night.

**Note** Because the Committee is still quite small in number, it still means that most of us fill more than one position; it would greatly help us to have a few volunteers to take on some of the tasks which run the everyday work of the society. Please talk to Judith at tea & cake time if you think you might be able to help us, we really don't bite.

**FOR THOSE WISHING TO PARK A CAR AT THE HALL FOR THE MEETING**

The hall committee tell me that there are 10 parking spaces in the car park behind the hall. After that cars have to be parked on the top green in front of the hall. From the village road there are two lanes up to the hall. The left lane, with a sign 'to the village hall', has a tarmac entrance way at the top onto the green, drive in and park FACING DOWNHILL, to ensure a good run off the hill to the entrance at the bottom. Please do NOT block the entrance by parking on the tarmac. The right hand lane has a short stretch of netting protected grass at the top to the left, but do also park there facing downhill.



## **MINUTES OF THE A.G.M. MARCH 29TH 2019 AT WOOKEY HOLE COMMUNITY HALL - held at 7.00pm prompt — Welcome by Les Davies MBE Mendip Society President**

1. Apologies received from Nigel Tasker, Marilyn & Keith Cattell, Terry Gifford, Gill Round, Dave & Margaret Parker, Pat Farrant, Judith Van Der Meulen, Gerald Offer.
  2. Minutes of the previous meeting on March 30<sup>th</sup> 2018; the Chairman asked for any comments or questions, there being none a show of hands signified its unanimous adoption. There were no matters arising not on the present agenda. (The Chairman later signed a witnessed copy of the minutes for the record)
  3. Chairman's welcome and comment on report, which was in the newsletter.  
Annual Report 2108 (read out by the Secretary, not in the March newsletter papers)  
Points covered included:
    - 1) The Committee is still very small and help is needed from the society membership.
    - 2) Our work in Partnerships achieves more than 'going it alone', we are aiming to be a 'hands-on' training provider for locally needed countryside skills such as hedging and dry stone walling, contributing to the AONB pool of volunteering resources. It is a matter of pride that for the third year running the AONB 'Volunteer of the Year' is a society member - Richard Ellis.
    - 3) Planning representation continues despite a worsening situation in housing building applications being forced upon authorities by Government policies.
    - 4) Activities have included visits to Gully Cave and Chancellors Farm, Slader's Leigh 'Wild Activity day and our Summer Social
    - 5) Communications remain of utmost importance, please use the website more, and also consider following the Face Book page which is useful for publicising events.  
There is a great need for members to tell the committee what activities and visits they enjoy otherwise their efforts are sometimes wasted when take-up is muted.
- Clive Constance commended the report and also thanked the Editor of the Newsletter for an enjoyable publication; he then proposed the adoption of the Annual Report; it was seconded by Nigel Taylor.
4. Reports – Reserves; Membership, Rights of Way, Walks Organiser, Webmaster, (all in the newsletter). Peter Janes (Membership) added a few comments to his report; the figures given in the March newsletter showed a small drop in numbers, he reminded members that we aren't just a provider of walks & we do need the support of everyone.
  5. Presentation & Adoption of the accounts for the year ending Dec 31<sup>st</sup> 2018. Copies were available in the hall; the Treasurer was not present so the Chair asked for any queries on them. Richard Dyson asked about the £2000 set aside for legal costs, so the stalemate situation with the previous Chairman over the old website was explained by Richard Frost, stating that it was just a precautionary measure, we hoped we didn't have to implement. The adoption of the accounts was proposed by Peter Janes and seconded by David Tranter. There was a show of hands to agree with the treasurer's proposal that the auditor, David Woodliffe be re-appointed for next year.
  6. Election of Officers: The President took the chair for the election of the Chairman, currently Richard Frost who was willing to stand for next year, and was elected unanimously. He then re-took the chair and proposed that the primary officers and other members of the committee willing to stand again be proposed en-block. One committee member, John Moore, did not want to stand for the committee but agreed to be a co-opted member (Webmaster) as co-opted members do not automatically become Society Trustees. There were nominations for two new members willing to stand, Sheila Dixon and Michael Rolfe, these were included as well. The en-bloc nominations were proposed by Nigel Taylor and seconded by Martin Fewing and were carried unanimously. The Chairman then welcomed Sheila and Mike as officers and invited Sheila to stand to introduce herself although she is already known to many members; Mike Rolfe wasn't present but is well known for his role as our Planning scrutiniser for Sedgemoor.
  7. A.O.B. from the Chair or from the floor.
    - a) Richard Ivens proposed that the starting time of 7pm for the AGM was too early for most and 7.30pm was better, many agreed with him and it was carried with a show of hands.
    - b) The President proposed that a combined meeting of walkers and committee should be held as soon as possible to conduct a review of the walks programme, its objectives, running, regulations and outcomes; this was agreed by many present and carried by a show of hands.
    - c) Richard Frost informed the members that Gill Davies had volunteered to be our 'environment officer' and would be interested to be informed of litter picks in individual villages, and in recycling efforts that the society could support.
    - d) Prof. Danielle Schreve, present as a member, wanted to thank the society for the generous grant awarded again for the coming summer to enable their fortnights dig to go ahead as planned. Everything is paid for by those on the dig, including the students who are helping and it is sometimes a struggle to make ends meet.



- e) Member Richard Ashley was thanked very much for obtaining and bringing along a good many of the book 'The Mendip Hills' to give out freely to those attending the AGM. Richard is also a Bristol Naturalist member, the society which published the book and donated surplus copies to ourselves.

8. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING – the date and venue for the AGM 2020- TBA.

As the hall had to be vacated quite early in the evening the business section of the meeting was declared closed by Richard, in preparation for the talk by our guest speaker Gerry Cottle

TEA AND CAKE - cakes were made and donated once more by Sue Ivens, thank you Sue. Donations were welcomed, and together with donations for the books £24 were raised.

For the next 45 minutes we were entertained and not a little shocked in equal measure by the owner of the Wookey Hole complex, Gerry Cottle, who told us how he got to be in the circus life, survived it and then how he came to the Wookey Hole Caves, and is now surviving here with his mind still full of the plans for the future. He was thanked by us all, with a loud round of applause.

## REPORTS FOR THE MEETING ON 27th MARCH 2020

### From the Chairman

The Society continues to make progress in our work for the Community and our members, providing a good selection of events plus a range of talks and I would like to thank Terry Gifford for his hard work in planning a programme of interesting subjects, attracting many a "full house".

Our walks leaders have again led a whole range of interesting walks which have proved to be so popular that it has created its own set of problems. So for the summer programme we will introduce some guidelines which we hope will alleviate the problem of being too popular. Through the year successful events amongst others were the Presidents Quiz, the Wassail, a visit to Sandford Mine, and charcoal burning and hedge laying in Tania's Wood.

We continue to support and work within the AONB partnership to our mutual benefit, and are happy to sponsor the bright new kit now worn by this year's intake of Young Rangers. We also contributed to the important work at Gully Cave and the 2019 Mendip Rocks Festival, which was bigger than ever and most successful. We have also simplified our Heritage Fund grants scheme to make it work better.

The proposed project to restore Decoy City / Starfish site will commence just as soon as spring arrives. We are talking to the Woodland Trust with a view to either planting new trees or a planned maintenance of existing woodlands, and we have also agreed to work together with the Wrington Lions in a mutual programme. Our planning scrutinising officers continue to work hard opposing those planning ideas we consider unsuitable, together with the C.P.R.E and the AONB's own officers. The rejection of the Airport extension application is proof that co-operation and a united front really do work.

None of this happens by accident, underlying all is the hard work done by the Committee with enthusiasm and careful planning whilst liaising with many other local groups; for this I thank the Management Committee very much indeed. *Richard Frost, March 2020*

## Financial Report for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> December 2019 (overview)

*Copies of the report will be available in the hall*

The Accounts for the above year have been completed and signed off by the independent examiner.

The Society made a surplus of £49k for the year just ended which was mainly due to a legacy of 48k from J Maitland further details of this bequest and it's future use will be given by the Chairman.

The small surplus for the year excluding this legacy was due to the write back of legal costs that were expensed in the previous year and not required.

Other income and expenditure was in line with what was expected - *Marilyn Cattell. March 2020*

## Membership

The table shows memberships in February over recent years. As members are given until the end of March to renew, the totals include those whose renewals are outstanding (there will be a reminder inserted into your copy if you have not yet renewed for 2020).

It may be seen that membership is slowly declining. To reverse this and allow the Society to thrive we need new members. Please encourage your friends and family to join.

If you pay by standing order please ensure that it is for the correct amount (shown in the last column of the table).

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Subs. cost
Single 60+	204	205	189	210	222	216	£15
Joint / family	122	117	112	117	114	107	£25
Single under 60	38	41	47	45	31	25	£18
Life members	18	17	16	16	16	16	60+ £375 < 60 £500
Small business	2	2	1	0	0	0	£50
Large business	0	0	1	2	2	2	£100
<b>Total</b>	<b>384</b>	<b>382</b>	<b>366</b>	<b>390</b>	<b>385</b>	<b>366</b>	
Subscriptions paid						302	
Subscriptions unpaid		as at	23/2/20			64	

We have managed to keep the subscription rates unchanged again (they were last increased in 2015) but with postage rising again in March we will need to keep this under review.

About 70% of members have signed up for gift aid, which allows us to claim back an extra 25% of the value of your subscription; 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 this sum. A higher rate tax payer can claim tax relief on sums given as gift aid, see [www.gov.uk/donating-to-charity/gift-aid](http://www.gov.uk/donating-to-charity/gift-aid). If you wish to complete/cancel a gift aid mandate please contact the Membership Secretary. *Peter Janes, March 2020*

## Rights of Way

During the past year, we have been consulted on eleven proposed Orders for the Modification of the Definitive Map of Public Rights of Way. Minor footpath diversions in the Parishes of Blagdon, Butleigh, East Harptree, Frome (& Selwood), Hemington (& Buckland Dinham) and St Cuthbert Out were supported.

### CHURCHILL PARISH

The diversion of footpath AX 14/46 corrects an anomaly where the definitive line of path follows a water-filled and overgrown ditch. The diverted line parallels the ditch and has been used for many years by walkers not wishing to get their feet wet. Footpath AX 14/32 currently runs along the drive to Ladymead Farm, through the farm garden and over land which will form part of the curtilage of a recently approved barn conversion. Its diversion to the new line of path would be remote from the farm and would provide an easier and more pleasant route for users. Both diversions are supported.

### STOKE ST MICHAEL PARISH

Currently footpaths SM 18/35 and 18/36 run through the yard and buildings of Stoke Bottom Farm. The proposal would re-site the paths away from the farm complex and result in a simplified footpath network in the area. No objections are raised.

### WINSCOMBE PARISH

Diversion of footpaths AX 29/17 and 29/18, both severely affected by the under construction 185 house redevelopment of Woodborough Farm. Both will become urban paths within a large housing estate.

Regrettably raised no objection as plan already approved by North Somerset.

### OTHER MATTERS DEALT WITH

1. We have been consulted by North Somerset regarding a proposal to modify the Definitive Map at Mendip Woods, Burrington. It is proposed to add, as a bridleway, the unscheduled route linking the highway at Burrington Link with the unmade bridleway at Stoney Lane (originally a carriage drive to Mendip Lodge). No objection in principle to the proposals which would improve the network of bridleways in the area, but concern was expressed over the probable increase in horse use of Stoney Lane, which lives up to its name and has poor access directly onto the A.368 at its northern end. Representations to the Highway Authority to improve this access and warning signs on the A.368 have proved fruitless, the Authority considering the existing conditions to be acceptable. A final decision on the modification is awaited.
2. The diversion of footpath AX 29/78 at Roman Road, Sandford, referred to in our two previous reports remains on hold, pending receipt of proof of land ownership from Thatchers. *Dave & Margaret Parker Rights of Way Officers Feb. 2020*

## The Mendip Society Website – [www.themendipsociety.org.uk](http://www.themendipsociety.org.uk)

The website is proving very useful for supporting the programme of Mendip Society events. It enables us to add new events, amend existing events and even cancel events where for example a speaker cannot attend or a walk becomes dangerous due to adverse conditions. We always try to support such changes with E-mails to the members. The website has between 200 to 300 'hits' per month so it is being used extensively. I update it usually every week.

We have enhanced the website with SSL Certification. (SSL is an acronym for Secure Sockets Layer -good for a pub quiz!). Although we do not use the website for money transactions (at present), secure websites are promoted by search engines such as Google and cannot be easily 'hacked'. Users may configure their search engine to reject non-secure sites. *John Moore- Mendip Society Webmaster*



## RESERVES WINTER ROUNDUP – SLADER'S LEIGH

I commented previously on the erratic summer weather, well, this following winter season has been just as bad with high volumes of rain and excessive winds, making management work quite difficult. And here I must register my thanks to Nick Raymond for his regular visits to Slader's Leigh to check on the ancient trees we have- especially the old oak which lost its top some years ago now and our two small leaved limes, all of which are over 800 years old. We also have to be wary of the line of ash trees which form our boundary along the top of the Strawberry Line embankment, some of which are showing signs of ash die back. Anyone driving up or down Burrington Combe recently will have seen the drastic clearance of the many die-back specimens considered to be in danger of falling into the road with the traffic danger that would entail. Ours are nowhere near as infected, but we have to keep a wary eye on them.

Our other ancient oak seems to be doing just fine in spite of a breeding season or two being covered in knopper galls and was chosen by the Kier Environment team as the tree in which to site an owl box for us. Kier is still continuing with a programme of visits and tasks started when the Bristol Water pipeline to Axbridge reservoir was laid, to mitigate the effect the scheme had on land it passed through. (or in our case, was a by-pass for such land.). They cleared out the invasive weed from the pond and also put up 5 dormice boxes because the embankment and our hedge boundary looks promisingly like good habitat. We did have dormice recorded all along the Strawberry Line in many years past and could well do so again if we do right thing with the collective vegetation.

Despite once being common, in the last 100 years, the native hazel dormouse has become extinct in 17 English counties, with recent UK reports showing that their numbers have declined by 51% in just 18 years. Dormice declines are linked to the loss of habitat and decreasing traditional woodland management practices. Although the embankment is not our land (it belongs to North Somerset Council), where it adjoins and mingles with our boundary hedge we do our best to look after it. The boxes won't show any occupation this season, by dormice anyway, as they hibernate in nests they build near the ground in tree holes etc. The boxes are used for summer night sleepovers!



*Re-aligning the owl box, giving a clearer flight path in*



*Dormice love sloes*



*Checking the dormouse box*

There is one thing I didn't report on in the last newsletter, which pleased me very much and which I would like to pop in here now. Our ancient Small Leaved Limes (*Tilia cordata*) are of the Mallow family (*Malvaceae*); the blossoms have a high sugar content and are therefore well suited as bee pasture, when they do flower. This has only been the once before in the 20 years I have worked in the meadow, in a year in which there was a 3 month very hot dry spell, weather which is vital. Flowering is very rare and propagation has to be by branch layering, but I do now wonder whether the changing climate will also cause this to happen more frequently.

Unfortunately, the long branches carrying the blossoms were so far out of reach I could not collect the fruits to see whether they were fertile or not.



*Tilia cordata flowers*





## RESERVES WINTER ROUNDUP – TANIA'S WOOD

It has been a rather wet and muddy time in the wood this winter so far and we have not held many work or training days; the ditches down the sides of the banks of the Deer Leap, and indeed even where there is no ditch, have been running torrents. Sadly they have not been enjoyed by the Blagdon Forest School who were unable to get the funding needed to run this spring term.



But the wood has not been entirely deserted as on several days a few volunteers with chain saw licences have met to clear the number of really tall trees, mostly wild cherries, which have been victims of the violent gusty winds which have blown through from the west and north. Why this particular species should be at risk we're not sure, it may be that it is not tolerant of the wet soil conditions coupled with the heavy shade from the surrounding tall canopy. But the upside of it is that the gaps created are letting in the light and sunshine and forming pockets of small glades- into which primroses have crept.

Across Britain, just 3% of woodlands are today being managed using traditional management techniques such as coppicing, thinning and hedge-laying, which maintains a balance of healthy habitats in a wood such as ours at Woodbridge Farm. Our woods and forests play a crucial role in healthy ecosystems, providing clean air and storing carbon as well as being an important habitat for our rarest animals such as red squirrels, pine martins and, down here on Mendip, the hazel dormouse. But human impact-centuries of felling for timber, deer raising and grazing for sheep has had a devastating effect. Really wild and native woods are now sparse and it is vital that the damage is repaired, which is why the Government last

November launched a £50 million scheme to help boost tree planting rates in the fight against climate change - committing to planting 11million trees by 2022.

I am very glad to be able to tell you that Tania's Wood is within that 3% managed traditionally.

Many conservation organisations have started programmes aiming to provide the tree whips and co-ordinate and advise on how, where, when and why to plant and the Mendip Society is working in partnership with the Woodland Trust and the AONB to contribute as much as possible to the overall progress on our Hills. Of course the highest plateau area will remain largely treeless such is its nature but the wooded coombes and slopes, especially to the north side have great potential. There is unfortunately one major fly in the ointment for the foreseeable future – Chalara or ash dieback, a fungus induced disease which is now infecting ash trees all over the UK and which it is estimated will kill 90% of them. Anyone who has travelled the B3134 through one of our most loved valleys on Mendip, Burrington Combe, will have seen the devastation of the roadside slopes where virtually all the huge, densely packed, old ash trees were in a dying dangerous condition and have had to be felled. Now, it is hoped to improve resilience of our woods to future diseases and climate change, by increasing the genetic diversity of trees in existing woods, and when planting new woods, using a mix of native tree species.



In Tania's Wood we have created, replanted, laid and gapped up long stretches of hedgerows, some of it extremely ancient remnants of the mediaeval Ubley Deer Park boundaries. In February this year we facilitated two training days in the old countryside skill of hedge laying with our favourite tutors, Tina Bath and Chris Claxton, enabling ten beginners and a few improvers, to master the techniques. Both Fridays were days when the two worst storms so far this year were ratcheting up their furies and everything had to be tied down or on to trees to be safe. But great gusts notwithstanding a thing of beauty emerged at the end of the day, of which they were rightly proud. The hedge was planted in 1991 by Glyn England, who deeded the wood to the society four years ago, and has been left to grow, apart from the occasional flailing and topping by the next door farmer, and was consequently very strong and rather wilful. A colossal amount of brash had to be removed from it before they could lay an axe to it, when it came to containing the laid branches between stakes – as in the North Somerset style – it took several of the team to force it into line. For the first time, as the committee had decided to do, we offered the tuition free to members and non-members alike; this was much appreciated by all. We still have several hundred meters of hedge laying to do to complete the whole wood boundary Line, so we expect to be holding more tuition days in the future.



*Hannah making 'chips'*



*Working in pairs*



*The Feb 21<sup>st</sup> group*



## GETTING READY FOR THE SUMMER DIGGING – a report by Professor Danielle Schreve of Royal Holloway University, London.

Late January this year saw two days of winter clearance work being undertaken at Gully Cave in the Ebbor Gorge NNR by a small team from Royal Holloway University, ably assisted by the AONB Volunteer Rangers (coordinated by Lauren Holt) and other colleagues from Natural England and the Geckoella Environmental Consultancy. The goal was to clear a bench of previously excavated spoil and modern soil, which will allow the digging team to excavate safely in front of the lower entrance of the cave on their annual visit in July this year.



*Above:* Society members standing on the previously excavated spoil and soil, which needed moving to get at the untouched ground in front of the cave (on the right of the photo) this summer.

With over twenty people on site digging and forming a bucket chain, the work progressed extremely quickly, helped by the boundless energy of the volunteers, cake and general good humour, and over 15 tons were cleared.

*Right:* Organised Industry – a bucket chain

Danielle, who leads the Gully Cave research, said “We are very lucky to have such wonderful people giving their time to help us with this important task. It has been a real pleasure to have them involved in the project and to hear how interested they are in our research, a great example of teamwork and collaboration”.



### OPINION: IN RESPONSE – by ALEX BALLARD

*I hope that you remember reading Mike Rolfe’s “Urban Development of the Countryside” in the last newsletter? Well someone who definitely read it – and has sent in her own opinion on the subject is long time member Alex Ballard of Congresbury.*

“I’m a very strong supporter of the need for new homes; in my voluntary work I see firsthand the misery caused by our failure in recent years to provide sufficient housing. We have increasing levels of homelessness and families in insecure tenancies, while even families who appear well housed are in many instances struggling to meet mortgage or rental costs with the inevitable impact that has on family life and child rearing.

Would it were as simple as balancing the demands of humans and nature, but it is not!

Covering the countryside with unaffordable three and four bed roomed detached houses in locations far from employment has negative consequences for humans and nature. Truly affordable housing can never be produced on isolated Greenfields, many of which in the area surrounding Mendip are at risk of flooding.



Starter homes for village young people within their villages – yes please.

Starter home close to employment centres, provided with public transport infrastructure – yes please. Expansion in the countryside is a ‘no’. It’s not even an ‘either/or’ conundrum. It’s bad in every way.

**Alex Ballard**



## THE CURSE OF FLY TIPPING – A Personal Opinion by Peter Janes

I often clear litter when out with our dogs but the other day I picked up a vacuum cleaner from the roadside near our house. Someone didn't drop this out of casual thoughtlessness but must have gone out of his or her way to dump it there, which raises the question "Why?". I can only speculate, but money and convenience are the most likely reasons. Somerset Waste Partnership (used by Mendip Council) charges £44.50<sup>1</sup> for collection of bulky items from houses and there are complex rules on who and what vehicles need a permit to visit waste recycling centres and what waste can be taken there<sup>2</sup>. Is it any surprise that selfish people choose to fly tip, especially since the chances of getting caught are miniscule. The BBC recently ran an article about the involvement of organised crime gangs in fly tipping<sup>3</sup>; these crooks would not be interested if there were no money to be made and that would not be the case if legal disposal of waste were free and easy to do.

Disposing of waste costs money and this must be covered somehow but the current official policy of charging for disposal is, frankly, mad. It makes as much sense as trying to prevent dirty water entering a river by blocking a ditch, all that happens is that the ditch overflows elsewhere. In principle, the costs of waste disposal should be transferred to the sale of things that will become waste while disposal should be free. This would reduce the amount of stuff (including packaging) produced and sold and remove the incentive to dispose of it illegally, it would also reduce consumption of resources and aid recycling. Of course, numerous refinements to this idea are necessary and this is not the place to explore them but unless the Powers-That-Be have a serious rethink it is difficult to see how the current situation will change.

In the meantime please report fly tipped rubbish to the appropriate council (it is easy on-line or by phone) and don't assume that someone else will already have done so. I have found that Mendip, B&NES and North Somerset councils are all pretty good at removing fly tips although less so at dealing with loose litter over extended areas. The photo shows a littered lay-by on the B3134, which I recently reported to Mendip Council and which was subsequently cleared.



N.B The numbers 1,2,3, in the 1<sup>st</sup> paragraph refer to the references at the bottom of the page.

### The Great British Spring Clean by Judith Tranter

The Mendip society will be getting behind this year's Great British Spring Clean, run by environmental charity Keep Britain Tidy.

The campaign, which runs from March 20<sup>th</sup> to April 13<sup>th</sup>, will see up to 600,000 people taking action to clean up streets, parks and beaches across the country. It brings together individuals, community organisations, businesses and councils to show they love where they live and in 2019 more than half a million #LitterHeroes collected more than 900,000 bags of rubbish. You can demonstrate that you care in all sorts of ways –

*by taking a bag to pick while you're walking the dog or taking the kids to school, getting a few friends together, having a clean up in your street or park, then going for a social coffee together ; hosting a clean-up or joining someone else's clean-up.*

We, as a society have been registered with them for several years now – both as a group and as individual members; this year Keep Britain Tidy is making several Awards for best results, including 'Best Team Effort'. How would it be to see the name of THE MENDIP SOCIETY' in the public domain on that award? – Brilliant!

So as many individual efforts by members as possible are required. We have one brilliant example to follow already – Janet and Richard Sherwin's Great big Clean Up they did recently, - see all about it on the back page. It can be done! So when you've done it please send the details in to me and I will enter it onto our 'dashboard' (yes, I'm learning the language!). These are the things I will have to enter:-

1. How long was your clean-up in minutes?
2. How many bags did you collect? (a-of general waste; b-of plastic bottles; c-of aluminium cans?)
3. How many volunteers took part in your clean up?



Everyone can join in with the Great British Spring Clean- you don't have to organise one or join others if you don't want to, but it is more fun if you do.

Peter Janes would like to have at least one Mendip Society litter pick with others joining him on top of Mendip – he is keen on lay-bys because it is safe to park in them, you can move from one to the other, they are full of litter usually, and the countryside is lovely.

Would anyone willing to join him sometime during 20<sup>th</sup> March-13<sup>th</sup> April period ring him to fix a date and place to have a jolly good clean-up. 01761 221995.

<sup>1</sup><https://www.mendip.gov.uk/article/6759/Bulky-waste-collection>

<sup>2</sup><https://www.somersetwaste.gov.uk/permit-questions-and-answers/>

<sup>3</sup><https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-50660138>





## News from the Hills

### Practical Work and Strategic Thinking

*From Jim Hardcastle, Manager of the Mendip Hills Unit*

We're fortunate at the Mendip Hills AONB Unit that we can balance practical nature recovery work on the ground with some of the strategies that are developed which sometimes feel much removed from the everyday work of keeping this area naturally beautiful.

Our programme of practical work is absolutely packed. We've doubled the amount of tasks we do on the ground, covering a wide range of work like clearing ponds, improving limestone grasslands, rebuilding dry stone walls and planting hedges. All these practical tasks help nature recover. We all know that our wildlife is suffering badly. Nature recovery is the new hot topic. Nature recovery plans are the way forward, we can't just 'conserve and enhance' wildlife, it's in such a poor state we have to help it recover.

On the Mendip Hills it's a simple message we're driving home with people, and that links our practical work to our strategic thinking. On our north facing slopes we're looking for tree planting, on the south facing slopes we need to improve our limestone grasslands and on the plateau we need to look at dry stone walls, hedges and ponds. You'll notice that our practical tasks all fall under one of those categories.

We also have a series of bids being submitted that help broad strategies become reality on the ground; A bid to encourage recreation that benefits the rural economy, whilst protecting the landscape of the Mendip Hills AONB has been submitted to the Rural Development Programme for England. At this stage it's only an Expression of Interest but if successful the funds will be used for:



- Producing a Destination Management Plan and an Economic Impact Assessment for the AONB.
- Installing and monitoring visitor counters in order to understand how, when and where people visit.
- Better understanding of how access and recreation benefits the local economy and people's health and wellbeing.
- Using existing long-distance trails (Strawberry Line, Limestone Link, Mendip Way) and the AONB website to promote local produce and places by creating an online tourist information hub and improved signage at key gateways.
- Improving surfacing of c.900m of footpath/bridleway at two key locations to provide better all-year access for visitors.

**Somerset Nature Connections\*** is a partnership project between Somerset Wildlife Trust, Quantock Hills, Blackdown Hills and Mendip Hills Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, supporting Somerset's communities to connect with the natural environment in order to improve their mental health.

A £50k grant from the Discovery Community Fund has been submitted in support of a larger grant to the National Lottery Community Fund that will provide a vital contribution to the funds needed to deliver the project, whilst also enabling a significant focus on adults with learning disabilities and/or autism at our Mendip Shed.

With increasing housing numbers planned for the area around the Mendip Hills AONB there is a need to prove where the visitor pressures are to guide mitigation. Counting on Mendip is a project supported by a bid to National Grid for £20k that will fund electronic visitor counters on rights of way, data collection from tourist attractions and analysis.

*ED: \*The Mendip Society has been asked to be part of the Somerset Nature Connections project by Kristen Lambert, the AONB Wellness Officer, she is masterminding a **Somerset Nature and Wellbeing Map**, bringing together Nature and Wellbeing providers; there is now a big group of organisations and individuals involved. As part of this she is producing the Map that will be on the Somerset Wildlife Trust's Website. This should be available soon for people to find out where they can go to just be with natural countryside, to be quiet and walk alone, or to join in with any organised event to talk and walk and be with others. Slader's Leigh fits in very nicely with the master plan & list.-*  
<https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/blog/sue-young/national-nature-map-uk>



## SOCIETY ROUNDUP

### "Protect Old Footpaths – Don't Lose your Way"

– by Peter Janes.

In the March 2019 Newsletter we described the risk (arising from the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000) that after 2026 any public right of way not already included in the definitive maps compiled by local authorities are likely to be lost. While old paths will not automatically be legally extinguished it will become much more difficult to establish their existence. Ramblers (which used to be called the Ramblers' Association) estimates that this may affect 10,000 miles of paths across the country and has launched a programme called "Don't Lose Your Way"; it is also pressing for an extension to the deadline. The programme involves volunteers comparing old and current maps and noting any lost paths which are then prioritised centrally and raised with local authorities. Anyone (not just Ramblers' members) can participate and it can be done on-line from the comfort of home. The "Don't Lose Your Way" online mapping tool splits the country into 150,000 1km squares and makes it easy to compare current and historic maps side by side. Users simply select a square, do a quick 'spot the difference', mark on any missing paths and click submit. It takes just a few minutes to check a square.

This is a really positive way for those who value footpaths to contribute to their protection. To take part go to the website <https://www.ramblers.org.uk/dontloseyourway> and click on "Join the search". There are instructions on the webpage and more detailed ones at <https://dontloseyourway.ramblers.org.uk/guides/submission-guide>.

*ED: Peter tells me "It takes just a few moments to review a grid square once one has got the hang of it; I have looked at a dozen or so on Mendip and noted several potentially lost paths. In fact, it is quite addictive and a good way to spend a rainy afternoon."*



Richard and Janet Sherwin spent a couple of hours cleaning Compton Rd in Shepton Mallet. Janet says "I actually enjoy it and I wish we could get a few more volunteers - maybe go for a drink afterwards to make it more social!"

Richard says that the Council were very good about collecting their bags of rubbish- they had no bother at all with arranging this. They would like others to join them.

## A President's View



Dear all,

The sun is shining as I write this, as if to try and tell me things will get better! After the wettest February on record there must surely be hope for a better month ahead. Things on the ground are definitely more difficult and farmers will be having a hard time. We keep hearing about climate change, where winters will be wetter and warmer and summers hotter and dryer. Is this the start?

Things within the Society are definitely on the up! It has been a great year, with so much achieved. We are involved in many areas now and becoming a 'game changer' in the future of the Mendip Hills. That's not only within the AONB, where the cooperation and mutual support is second to none, but also over the greater area of Mendip itself. The future is bright and a small working group has been busy looking at our tomorrow. To stand still is to stagnate, so we don't just want to sit back and do what we have always done. The other side of this coin is we need to stay true to our roots and remember the reason this Society was created... To help enhance and protect the very special nature of this unique landscape.

There will always be a cry for extra members. We need people who can and are willing to make a difference. I speak to the converted here, but I'm sure that there are many others who would be willing to come and be part of such a special organisation as this. I'm looking forward to seeing as many of you as possible at this year's AGM... Where do the years go?

Finally, as an offering that perhaps spring is on the



way, here is a picture of Langford Court in all its spring glory!

With kindest regards and thanks to you all - **Les**