

Mendip



From the Chair

As I sit down to write this article for the Mendip Society Newsletter I realise it will be the last one of the year.

They say time flies and it does in some respects, but to me this year seems to have been somewhat extended. The only reason I can think of is that this terrific summer has just gone on for so long it has given us the false sense of time. I think it's for this reason I feel that there isn't any great urgency to rush around as usual. Don't get me wrong, I haven't stopped all year and have achieved many things on my 'to do' list and more, but at the same time there's that 'always tomorrow feeling'.



Right, now I have snapped out of my little dream world and am hugely aware that if I don't get this article to Mike by the morning he'll not be a happy bunny, and that's it, that's the thing isn't it? We're all happy to let others to get on with it, so here I am back to reality with a bang. A list here of new contacts and ideas to move the Mendip Society forward with the grateful help of the Committee and friends of the society.

It is difficult to see what changes could happen to the Mendip Hills and beyond if the talked about protection of planning laws, and development restrictions are lifted, we have, and we will continue to fight, lobby, protest, and campaign to keep our precious landscapes and communities protected in these turbulent times.

Finally, I hope you will join us as we embark upon a wider interest of walks, talks, and shared events scheduled for the coming months and the year ahead. All for now.

Tina



And from the Editor

With this edition, I have a problem... Albeit a very welcome one. With an upsurge in activities running through the summer and even more planned for 2026 - I simply don't have the room to fit everything in to the 20 page format we try to stick to!



Long may it continue I say, but please accept my apologies if not all the articles and photographs offered up by members old and new make it into our pages.

Thanks are due of course to those of you who have stepped up and organised walks, talks and other events. THIS is the Mendip Society I want to be a part of. One that has a regular and varied programme of things going on, organised by many members not just the same few.

A society that takes an active interest in all areas of Mendip life - and that makes its voice heard when planners, government and others threaten to do anything that might negatively affect the area we are named after.

At its best, the Mendip Society is not just; *"a group of friends that go for occasional walks"* - as it was once negatively described to me. We do that of course, but we do so much more besides. We raise and distribute funds to support activities judged to be for the good of Mendip and its inhabitants. We monitor planning, rights of way and government plans that affect the area. We care for the environment, history, nature, wildlife, geology, and traditions of Mendip - and much, much more.

I should just mention, that for various reasons, not least the march of time, many of the society's stalwarts are no longer able to contribute as much as they once did. You will find more about that on the pages that follow. So in closing can I just appeal to the rest of you to step-up, volunteer and get stuck in. We NEED more of you to play a role to ensure the successful future of our society.

Cheers, Mike. **E-Mail: themendipsociety.photos@gmail.com**

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Cover Photo. - by Roger Harvey.
Beech Trees near Burrington Ham.
Roger's second cover shot - the last being two plough horses featured on edition 166.

Membership Renewal

Subscription Renewal 2026

Subscriptions for 2026 are due shortly. We hope you will want to continue as a member of the Mendip Society which, as we feel sure you will agree, offers good value for all. Subscription rates are unchanged from last year and are as follows:

Under 60 single	£20
60+ single	£17
Joint / family (at the same address)	£27

This year we are introducing an online sign-up using Zeffy (more about which can be found on page ten of this edition). If you have a smart phone or tablet with a camera, simply scan the QR code to the right to be taken to the simple step-by-step process, or use this link: <https://www.zeffy.com/en-GB/ticketing/join-us> to get there on a PC without a camera.



If you prefer, payment may be still be made by sending a cheque made payable to: **Mendip Society**, to the Membership Secretary, c/o The Cottage Harptree Hill, West Harptree, BS40 6EJ. Or by BACS transfer to the Society's account: **Mendip Society**. Sort code **30-91-84**. Account number **00596344** at **Lloyds Bank**. If a cheque is not drawn on the member's account please write the member's name on the back. If paying by BACS please give your name and initials as the reference and notify the membership secretary of your renewal by email: membership@themendipsociety.org.uk, or telephone **01761 221995**.

Finally, if you have a standing order in place, please check it is still for the correct amount.

Vacancies

I'm not sure how else to describe this... For a very long time now, the name "Tranter" has been synonymous with Mendip Society activities. Judith and David have, between them, been the backbone of much that the society does.

As many will know, Judith edited this newsletter before me, plus acted as society secretary for many years. Stepping back from those roles she then went on to be our Small Grants Officer, and for an even longer time, she and David have managed both nature reserves. David meanwhile, was also one of the small but dedicated group working on dry stone walling across Mendip, and both of them have created, stored and transported much of the display equipment that we take to events such as the ploughing match, in order to keep the public informed about the society and all that it does.

Unsurprisingly, both now feel that they need a rest. Not that I imagine for one second that they will be putting their feet up, but they would like to hand over some of the responsibility for all things Mendip to others who might carry on their good works.

I am very pleased to have been trusted with the newsletter, which I hope members will agree, has been handed over by Judith into a safe pair of hands. Other members of the committee have stepped up to fill the gaps in our team - albeit on a (hopefully) temporary basis. The simple truth though is that the Mendip Society does require quite a lot of team effort to keep it running smoothly. So this is an appeal to long-term members and newcomers alike. **WE NEED YOU!**...

We have some new Walks, Talks and Events planners - and the difference they are making is already apparent. They would be very happy to hear from anyone who could help by leading a walk, organising a talk, or planning an event.

We need new Reserves Managers. Support and training will be forthcoming, but any volunteers would be very welcome.

Sadly, as the obituary on page 19 tells, we recently lost Dave Parker, who with his wife Margaret acted as our Rights-of-Way Officers for many years. Anyone who regularly walks on Mendip would be welcome to step into their boots - possibly a small team, to cover this important area.

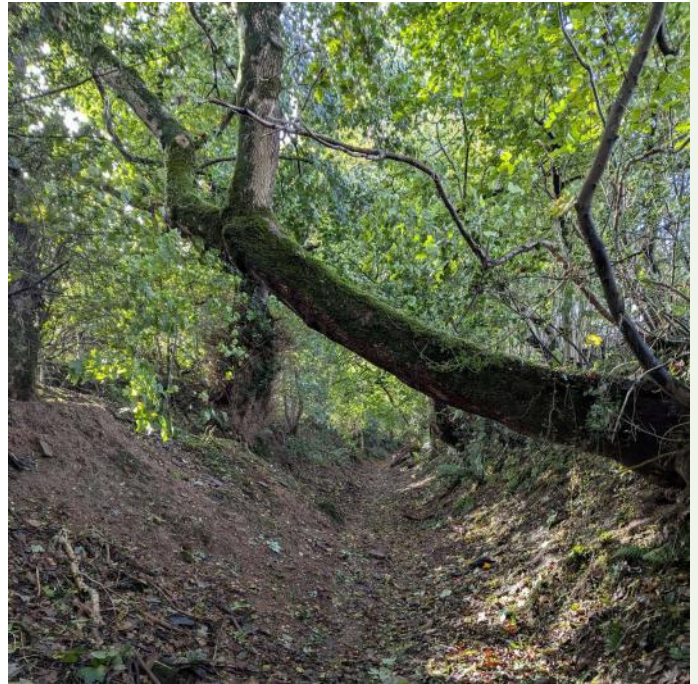
Plus, of course, anyone who can help out in any way whatsoever - many hands make light work! If you think you can help by getting stuck in, even only occasionally, please contact Peter Janes at: secretary@themendipsociety.org.uk

An East Mendip Walk with Ian Dagger

Storm Amy did her level best to spoil Ian Dagger's plans for an Autumn walk, but after carefully checking out and risk assessing the route, Ian decided it was safe to proceed. A group of hardy individuals joined him for what turned out to be a rewarding experience. New members, Linda Tandy and Mark Chivers offered up some words and pictures to let the rest of know what we missed!



Ian and Liz with some hardy walkers
Photo: Linda Tandy



Walking through the Beech woods
Photo: Linda Tandy



Cranmore Tower, the highest point on the walk.
Photo: Linda Tandy

"Despite the wet and windy weather, a small group of us enjoyed a great walk which was just over 6 miles. Starting in the village of Stoke St Michael we wandered through tracks and woods alive with fungi of all shapes and sizes, crossed open fields with far reaching views before reaching Cranmore Tower a 19th century folly. It sits 280 metres above sea level and is the highest point on the Mendip way. The elements didn't dampen our spirits and I'm sure everyone enjoyed the beauty of the landscape as well as the good company and a great walk.

Thanks to Liz and Ian for guiding us all."

Linda

Will your photographs feature in our next edition?

We are always keen to have members send in their photographs and reports.

You don't need to have an expensive camera or fancy software, just a willingness to "have a go".

Please send your words and pictures to us at:
themendipsociety.photos@gmail.com

Words and pictures - Linda Tandy and Mark Chivers

"On 4th October I decided with my partner Frances and friend Tim to brave the edge of Storm Amy to join a walk with the Mendip Society. This was our first outing with the Mendip Society, and we were eager to explore East Mendip, which we're not very familiar with.

We met with walk leader Ian, his wife Liz, and two other walkers in Stoke St Michael, and were made very welcome. The start of the route led up the sunken Red Lane, with a carpet of hazelnuts crunching underfoot, before following a right-of-way through blustery fields that skirted the edge of the local quarries. Glowering clouds scudded across the sky for most of the walk, and grey veils of rain could be seen in the distance, but the sun peeped through occasionally, and we only experienced a couple of brief hail showers!

The route looped back around towards Stoke St Michael via pleasant farmland, along the East Mendip Way, over ancient stone stiles, and beside moss-covered walls, until we were amongst the gorgeous beech trees of Wellington Wood. The stunning Cranmore Tower loomed between the huge trunks, marking the highest point in East Mendip.

From there we headed down through green lanes into Stoke St Michael, stopping to admire the picturesque buildings at the heart of the village, including the Knatchbull Arms, originally built in the 17th Century, as well as the 12th Century church. We thoroughly enjoyed our walk with the Mendip Society - Ian and Liz provided interesting facts along the route, Tim helped identify some of the fungi that we encountered, and we collected pocketfuls of walnuts and apples. We look forward to our next walk with the group!"

Mark



One of many Beech trees in Wellington Wood.
Photo: Mark Chivers



Striding out in the sunshine - blustery, but not all bad...
Photo: Mark Chivers



Tim Allen identifying fungus for the group.
Photo: Mark Chivers



...In fact very pleasant for much of the time!
Photo: Mark Chivers

Mendip Ploughing Match. Wednesday 24th September - Ian Dagger

The Mendip Ploughing Society held its 167th competition on a fine Autumn day at Franklyn's Farm Chewton Mendip. Formerly known as the Blagdon, Winford, Charterhouse and West Mendip Ploughing Society, established in 1858.

Think how farming practices have changed since 1858. Ploughing done by teams of horses, then steam tractors, then ever bigger tractors now with rotating ploughs, GPS and air-conditioned cabs. Hedges that were laid instead of flailed. Walls built with stone taken from the fields and built without mortar or cement mixer. And for the hedging and the stone walling our own local way of doing it, based on the materials the craftsmen had to work with. Ploughing matches help keep these skills and knowledge alive and that is one good reason for the Mendip Society to support this annual event.

In addition, there are also classes for best roots, forage, grain and novelty like heaviest pumpkin, tallest sunflower and largest sunflower head.

Both the Mendip Society and National Landscapes had information stands at the event. It is a good opportunity to meet potential members and to explain what we are about.



Just the one pair of plough horses this year.
Photo: Judith Tranter

This year the ploughing classes were very well supported with over 100 competitors competing in 15 classes. There are classes for different make and age of tractors, and different types and make of plough. Vintage tractors are up to 1959, classic up to around 1976 when Q cab regs came in. There are also classes for conventional and reversible ploughs. However it was sad to see only one team of heavy horses and no steam this year.

I was also interested in the farm itself. There was diversity in the form of a field given over to solar, two wind turbines and pheasant rearing and shoots. But what struck me most was the size of the fields, they were huge. It was also good to see that large fields did have margins to allow corridors for wildlife.



...But a couple of Wind Turbines!
Photo: Judith Tranter

Not to be missed is the tractor ride that takes you around the whole site which gives you ample time to exchange banter with Les who answers questions and provides a commentary. (Nice jacket - Les). Tina was also there stewarding the hedge laying and Dave and Judith on the information stand.

However, nothing surpasses the lunch put on by the ladies. Soup, Ploughman's, Cheese and Biscuits and Tea or Coffee. You would be hard pressed to find better quality and value for money. Another great day out on Mendip.



Two shots of competitors, hard at work and deep in concentration during the ploughing match.
Photos: Roger Harvey

Somerset V Hitler - The Walk + The Mendip Hospital Cemetery Visit.

For a third year in a row I was blessed with perfect weather and a lovely group of walkers when, on the first weekend of September, I led the walk, originally conceived by local historian and Mendip Ranger, Donald Brown, looking at WW2 activity on Blackdown.

I think I have said more than enough, both on the hills and now in my indoor talk on the subject. However, I did just want to feature some great photographs, taken by new member Merille Ryder as we made our way over the hillside.



Exmoor ponies, very much at home on Mendip.
Photo: Merille Ryder.



Our group makes its way towards West Bunker.
Photo: Merille Ryder.

Also worth mentioning - though not easy to photograph, were the thousands of Peacock Butterflies that had taken up residence in West Bunker. We were, of course, careful not to disturb them, but it did add an extra dimension to the day - as did the welcome tea and cake provided by Marion and Chris Ball at nearby St Hugh's when we returned at the end of the walk.

As ever, my thanks to Marion and Chris, to Charterhouse Outdoor Centre for parking, and to MHNL for the bunker key.

Mendip Society members had another fascinating insight into the history of the Mendip Hospital Cemetery. We met Clare one of the trustees, who gave us a wonderful history of the cemetery, with emotional moving histories of some of those buried there. A current interesting update was told by Clare, following a visit from a Frome-based group called Open Story Tellers, who look after adults with learning disabilities who, in times past, would have been possibly sent to an asylum such as the Somerset and Bath County Pauper Lunatic Asylum, later the Mendip Hospital.

As a result of the project, Open Story Tellers, with funding from a National Heritage Lottery Fund project grant, created an amazing production based on their research, called "Through the Front Door", performed to great acclaim at the Frome Memorial Theatre. The whole project and the production were filmed using locations including the Mendip Hospital Cemetery and in Wells itself. Central to the story was Mary Ann Norman. A patient at the asylum and a well-known character in Wells in the late 1800s. The film was also shown at the Wells & Mendip Museum on October 10th.



Left: a view of the chapel from the lane.



Centre: Sculpture using wood from fallen trees.
Photos: Roger Harvey



Right: Some of the many grave markers

Where's the Beef? - Stephen Down



We recently had the pleasure of reacquainting ourselves with Ebbor Grove Farm where Neil Tustian and Lottie Sweeney are now seven years into their work of raising a small herd of 100% grass fed Ruby Red beef cattle.

Neil and Lottie have chosen to do things differently, employing some unconventional strategies to restore the 186 acres of Mendip farmland in their care. They have seen significant improvements in the diversity of flora and fauna as a result. Hearing them talk enthusiastically about their experiences and the rationale behind their choices is a delight and very thought provoking.

The beef produced is 100% Pasture for Life approved and we were curious to try out some of the French cuts that were available alongside the more familiar fare that they offer.

Members and guests will have had a chance to attend a walk and talk at the farm on 23rd October. Too late to be included this edition, but we hope we might have encouraged you to get your boots on and join us for a gentle walk, a brew and cake and a chance to hear from some passionate people making a difference to Mendip in the future.



"Diddy Boy". Out on the pasture with his girls.

Photo: Stephen Down



A Wasp Spider encountered on the farm.

Photo: Stephen Down

A Mendip First - and Spotted Flycatchers, er... spotted.



You may have seen recently on local and national news, that a species which has been extinct from the Southwest (and most of England) for over 100 years was recently spotted on a camera trap – right here on Mendip!

A Patch Wilder is a conservation project at Lillypool Farm near Shipham. Co-owner Charlie Fayers was surprised, when checking video files on his trail cam, to see this distinctive creature (right) bounding out of the undergrowth.

Some re-introductions have taken place in the Forest of Dean, Exmoor, and Dartmoor but the closest of these is over 50 miles from Mendip, so it is a bit of a mystery as to where this one came from. Parts of our hills are well-suited to supporting pine martens, having the woodland, den sites and an abundance of the food they need - this one however, seems to have decided for itself where it wants to live.



A still image from the captured video.
Image credit: Jam Press / A Patch Wilder.

Spotted Flycatchers

Dr Lincoln Garland is an ecologist living locally, who has recently been researching Spotted Flycatchers in our area. This is another species that was thought to be locally extinct, but Dr. Garland's research has proved otherwise. Not only that, it seems that they are alive and well in and around the Vale of Winscombe, and are another species spotted by Charlie Fayers at A Patch Wilder!

Dr. Garland's work is due to be published soon, but meanwhile here is a brief taste of his writing.

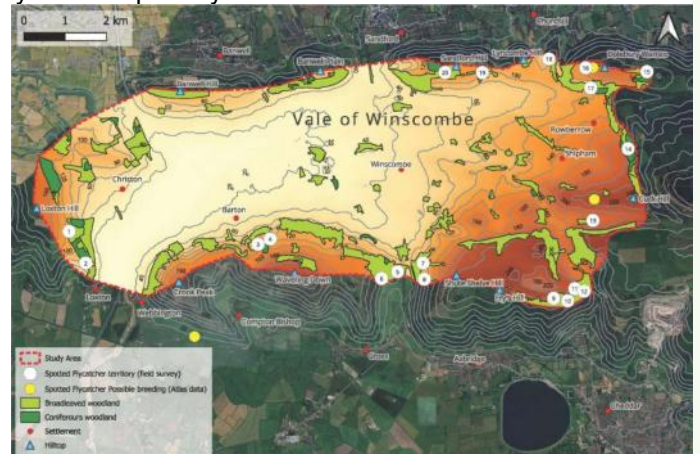
"Until recently, I thought Spotted Flycatchers had disappeared from the Vale of Winscombe, so it was a real surprise to encounter a breeding pair in woodland near Winscombe in 2024. That initial sighting led me to undertake further surveys, and by the end of this summer, I'd identified multiple breeding territories along the hillsides surrounding the Vale, all of which were associated with mosaic habitats."

I believe my findings highlight the crucial role of land management efforts, especially those led by organizations like the Mendip Society, Somerset and Avon Wildlife Trusts, National Trust, the AONB, and farmers participating in agri-environmental schemes." You can read more at: www.preprints.org/manuscript/202509.1181/v1

We hope to organise a visit to A Patch Wilder around June next year. Keep an eye on the website for details.



A Spotted Flycatcher at A Patch Wilder
Photo: Charlie Fayers / A Patch Wilder



The Vale of Winscombe, the area studied.
Map Credit: Dr Lincoln Garland

Introducing Zeffy

Zeffy (odd name, but great idea) is a new (to the UK at least) online fundraising platform for charities and non-profit companies. We are hoping it can solve several problems for the Mendip Society – without costing us a penny! Below is a quick breakdown of some of the ways it should be able to help us.

- Keeping a track of our membership has always been a time-consuming task, especially when it comes to renewals and keeping an accurate record of payments. Zeffy should allow us to automate and streamline not only new sign-ups, but also annual renewals and sending out important information to the membership by e-mail.
- Planning and running walks, talks and events also present a range of problems for organisers.
 - ◆ How many people are attending?
 - ◆ How do we set a maximum number of attendees?
 - ◆ Have non-members paid their dues?
 - ◆ Do we have enough tea, coffee and other provisions?
 - ◆ Can we let people know if arrangements change at the last minute?

Zeffy can help us with all of these and potentially, much more besides. With it we can custom design, easy to use, online access to our membership form and event ticketing – it can actually do much more for us, but let's not rush in headlong!...

The key thing for our members to know is that using Zeffy is totally free for us, and secure as it uses certified online financial systems that we have had to jump through several metaphorical hoops in order to use.

So, what can we expect?

In this edition you may have seen an invitation to use Zeffy to renew your membership. This can be done using a QR code, which you can scan, or a web link, which you will have to type in, unless you are viewing the PDF version in which case the link should work just like visiting any other web page. Once there, on a phone, tablet or PC, you will see all the familiar questions associated with our old paper form, just in a different format. Once you have filled in the details you will be able to pay using a credit or debit card and everything will happen automatically.

The same thing will happen if you sign up for a walk, talk or other event organised by the society. As a member most of these will be free, so just select the members option and you will get included without spending anything. Non-members and guests will see exactly the same form, but will be able to pay the appropriate fee, and all without leaving the comfort of their armchair. We will also be able to put the QR code and link onto posters and on social media, making it easy for potential new members to get involved.

Better still Zeffy will compile a list of every applicant for membership or a given event and enable the organisers to know, not only who has signed up, but also how to contact them if necessary.

So, how is it all “free” – what's the catch?

Well, you will get an “Opportunity” to donate to Zeffy associated with each ticket or membership - but this is absolutely NOT something you need to pay any attention to. Zeffy make it very clear that it is no way obligatory to support them, though of course, if you feel you want to, they will be very grateful. Data collected is ours not theirs, and we will only use it for the specific purpose you give it to us for – exactly as it would be if you gave it to us using more traditional means.

Please do give Zeffy a try, both for renewing your membership and for signing up to any events you wish to attend. We think it will make a huge difference to those of us organising the society on your behalf, streamlining the somewhat dull, tedious, but necessary administration tasks. Hopefully it will also make your lives easier too.

The Drive to Build 1.5 Million Homes in 5 Years and How to Respond

The population of the UK has or is projected to increase at a rate of between 500,000 to 600,000 people per year between 2021 and 2026, driven mainly by international migration. Accordingly, successive governments have undertaken to build new homes at a rate of 300,000 per annum or 1.5 million over a five year period. In essence, this rate of build represents 7 (seven) cities the size of Bristol.

Unsurprisingly, our precious countryside has been and will continue to be slowly eroded. For example, look around the perimeters of Taunton, Bridgwater, Weston-super Mare and Wells and smaller 'villages' such as Churchill and Cheddar. You will find that flora and fauna are disappearing under the weight of homes, commercial buildings, roads and other infrastructure.

Stopping development is unrealistic. Homes are required and will be built. In these circumstances, The Mendip Society, likeminded bodies and all who care about the preservation of our countryside, architectural heritage and indeed our planet earth, need to remain alert and actively vigilant.

How to act. Contact your local council planning department and ask it to send you its weekly summary of planning applications for your area. Such summaries provide links to current applications and they are free of charge. Study application details preferably in conjunction with the Council's Local Plan and the Neighbourhood Plan if there is one. (Plans can be found on the Council's website). Where appropriate, submit objections to your local planning department, explaining clearly why you do not agree with a particular application. For instance, describe the damage a large, poorly designed urban style development will cause to the Mendip Hills AONB, our countryside and the character of a town or village. Draw attention to inadequate road systems and the damage caused by large numbers of additional vehicles generated by these developments. Explain how large estates in the countryside adversely affect flora and fauna and climate change by destroying the natural environment and cause excessive light and noise pollution. Cross reference objections to any non-compliance with the Local Plan and/or Neighbourhood Plan.

Michael Rolfe - Mendip Society Planning Officer.

Legacies

We were recently invited by Lyons Bowe, a local legal practice with branches across the South West and South Wales, to become featured on their legacy scheme webpage. Through this scheme they offer a reduced cost will writing service if a client includes a legacy to charity. As you may well be aware, especially if you read Peter Janes' article in our last newsletter, there are tax advantages to doing so.

Of course, this is something that is open to everyone, and every solicitor / will writing service can advise you on the subject. But Lyons Bowe have gone one step further and "partnered" with a number of charities, us included, to proactively encourage people to think about leaving a legacy to their favourite good cause when drawing up their will.

We are of course delighted to be listed alongside many leading local and national charities, all of which stand to benefit from the increased publicity of their cause and their efforts to make the world a better place. We wish the scheme, and all its participants every success.

We do want to assure our members, followers and readers however, that the society's involvement is in no way whatsoever a recommendation or endorsement of Lyons Bowe over any other similar firm. We are grateful to be included, but have no direct allegiance beyond allowing the use of our name and logo to help promote the scheme in general.

You can find our page on the Lyons Bowe website at:
www.lyonsbowe.co.uk/charity/the-mendip-society
 and read about two generous gifts to the society on page 18



Slader's Leigh and Tania's Wood - Summer 2025



After months of drought that everyone and everything had to contend with, the flower meadow has thankfully not suffered too badly, although the pond dried up completely, the flowers bloomed quite well but were much shorter and smaller headed and didn't last as long as usual. The signs by which we usually mark the changing of the seasons were seen much earlier – some trees developed brown leaves very early on, their fruits were produced and dispersed in vast quantities all over the place. But conversely the vegetation in ditches, on banks and over and around hedges, fences and virtually everything remaining still long enough, was covered in an outburst of vegetation growth. Paths and gateways disappeared and needed to be cleared frequently. This over production of seeds, nuts and berries is called a 'Mast Year' and is a survival reaction of the stressed trees, making sure if there is a chance of a follow-on specimen next year if it itself should succumb to the drought. And many of them have died and more will during the winter. Having said this, one or two of the ancient oaks, outliers of Kings Wood, and those in Tania's Wood have produced acorns of huge size and a beautiful colour. I have collected some of these for Bleadon Trees, a Community Nursery for which we are Tree Council registered collectors, meaning resulting saplings will have the all-important provenance, much desired these days.

As always, with the vagrancies of the weather, the week we set aside for the cutting of the meadow changed the drought to extreme wetness, with constant downpours. We postponed the cutting for a week, then picked on one day in the last week of August and hoped for the best. We were very lucky in that we had several volunteer scythes (for whom a bit of dampness in the grass is a blessing) and a couple of the newly qualified, brush cutters. But to help us out we had the freely given labour of two lovely volunteers who came with their own Allen Scythes, (filled up with fuel by themselves). All this help made sure that we had the whole meadow cut by 3pm our traditional finish time for a hard days' work.

We had another work day nearly two weeks later for the raking up of the cut grass – this was longer than we ever want to leave it as the grass underneath a wet mass of cut material suffers. We had almost cleared the whole meadow when the weather broke again, and we abandoned the day. Everything was saved by volunteer Richard Ellis who returned after the next dry day and finished the job.



Lunch break for the gang.
Photo: Judith Tranter



Tucksey raking, Sheena and Beth collecting by the bag load.
Photo: Judith Tranter

Officially the hottest Year On Record!*

At Tania's Wood in Ubley, Peter Janes had already cut the field which serves as our car park for events earlier in the summer with his trusty mower, but it had grown extraordinarily wildly to a really long length once more, so another work day was called for - this time it had to all be done by hand because of the thick rankness of the growth. Thank goodness for all our volunteers who are able to scythe – or have recently gained their strimmers' certificates.



Richard Ellis, Nick Raymond & Beth Yates fight with the grass
Photo: Judith Tranter



The gate posts on the Right of Way entrance to the wood had to be replaced -
Photo: Judith Tranter



Peter testing the blade sharpness
Photo: Judith Tranter



John and David tackling the blackthorn creep
Photo: Judith Tranter



Brush cutters needed for clearing out the ditch
Photo: Judith Tranter



Richard - champion pile shifter
Photo: Judith Tranter

To all of those who helped, many on both days, I extend the thanks not only of myself but of the whole Society. We would be lost without them.

Text & photos by Judith Tranter

* As declared by the Met Office at 1.5 degrees above the long-term average.

Bats

You may recall that our Small Grants Fund recently funded the purchase of bat detectors for Amanda Boyd and BATS WITHOUT BORDERS, which aims to introduce young people to bats. As a lot of this work is based on Mendip, and near our nature reserves in particular, we asked Amanda to run an evening bat walk for us.

As the sun was setting on August 3rd, a group of around fifteen plus, Amanda and ecologist Dr Matt Booker, set out to walk from Winscombe to Slader's Leigh. There was a short introductory talk by Matt while Amanda checked and distributed the detectors. It was explained that each type of bat has its own, distinctive sound signature and that we needed to tune the detectors to different frequencies in order to hear them.

Within minutes of setting off several detectors burst into life, giving us the clue to look up and see several tiny creatures flitting around over the trees. This set the mood, and the rest of the trip was filled with participants comparing notes and trying different settings on their detectors. Sadly, as darkness fell, so did bat activity, but Matt's expert knowledge, offered up at various points along the way, kept everyone's interest keen throughout and gave many the urge to find out more.

Hopefully we are going to have Matt give us a talk on the subject in early 2026. Keep checking the events page of our website for location and date.



Amanda prepares the detectors while Matt tells us what to expect.
Photo: Mike Harvey



Walking the Strawberry Line from Winscombe to Slader's Leigh.
Photo: Mike Harvey

The bat detectors used on this trip were funded by our Small Grants Scheme. Through it, farmers, landowners, schools, youth clubs, charities, community groups and others, can get financial support for a wide range of schemes and activities that benefit Mendip in some way.

Over the years many good causes have been supported, and thousands of pounds have been put to good use on your behalf. Each application is judged on its individual merits by the committee who discuss and vote on all applications.

Applications are made online using a form available on the society's website. Applicants click a link or scan the QR code (see right) to be taken to a questionnaire that leads them through the process and prompts them to complete all the vital questions to ensure we get all the key information delivered to us.

If you have a project that you think might qualify, please do let us know by filling out the form and submitting a request. What have you got to lose?



St Hugh's Charterhouse, A small Grant in action - By Judith Tranter.

The Society's long association with St Hugh's Chapel, on top of Mendip, at Charterhouse, is probably a great deal to do with the thirty or so years that the two Society members pictured here have been volunteering for the Chapel in so many ways: - Chris and Marion Ball.



Chris Ball, as the present Treasurer of St. Andrew's, Blagdon PCC, which includes St Hugh's, applied to us for a grant to repair the back door leading to the kitchen area, outside which they are standing.

Being so high up on the Mendip Hills means it is exposed to all weathers, howling winds, torrential rain, frosts, snow, and at times blistering sunshine. Good maintenance is a must. – on this occasion of a worn-out wooden door, which we were pleased to get repaired and made secure again.

The Chapel is open throughout the summer months on Sundays for visitors and walkers to refresh themselves with tea and delicious cakes made by Marion, and others. It also holds various services including the famous Christmas Eve Carol Service with which our own President, Les Davies MBE has been associated for many years.

The Chapels' book table has promoted the Society over the years with our various leaflets and books. Chris and Marion take seriously the ethos of the Society which is one of caring and seeking to promote the Mendip Hills and its way of life and are realising this in their service for this extraordinary little living building on the hill, at Charterhouse.

On behalf of the PCC of St. Andrew's, Blagdon and St. Hugh's, Charterhouse I would be pleased if you would convey our grateful thanks to the members of the Mendip Society for the very generous donation of £975 which will enable us to repair the door of the Church

This work is scheduled to be carried out in the next few weeks.

We hope you will all come and share this wonderful space on the Mendips with us.

Yours sincerely


C.B. Ball
Treasurer



Above is a letter from Chris Ball, thanking us all for the grant, used to repair the door as seen here, before and after. I just wanted to add my own few words about Chris and Marion Ball, whilst we were on the subject.

I first met them some years ago now. Marion was a good friend of my mothers, and took on the running of the "Old Girl's association" for the school that they had both attended when mum stepped down.

We stayed in touch, partly through our mutual membership of the Mendip Society, but also because, once you have met these lovely people they are friends for life! So much so, that when I started running my WW2 walks in the area, I felt it only natural to ask them if they would open up St Hugh's for an after walk cuppa, debrief and chat. This they have done every year since, Marion also laying on some of her famous home baking to go with a very welcome brew.

If anyone epitomises the spirit of Mendip better, I have yet to meet them.

Ed.

Walks, talks and events, organised by The Mendip Society

Wednesday 19th November - 11:00am - 1:00pm. **Management and Fungi on Hellenge Hill Reserve.**

A guided walk over Hellenge Hill with Avon Wildlife Trust. (Moderate to steep). Limited to 15 places - Booking essential. Contact: Tina Bath on: **07880 664 207**. Text only please. Please dress to suit the weather forecast on the day.

Meeting point: Roman Road, Bleadon, North Somerset, BS24 0AD (opposite the golf course).

NGR: ST 344 576. **What three words ref:** ///renovated.centally.pass



Friday 28th November - 7:00 pm. **Secret World Wildlife Rescue. A talk with slides**

Join us and George Bethell of Secret World, for a fascinating talk and slide show about the work of Secret World. As it will be less than a month to Christmas, we will follow the talk with a "Christmas Social", including a drink and mince pie.

AT: Bishop Sutton Village Hall, Wick Road, Bishop Sutton BS39 5XQ. Free to members, £5 charge for guests.

NGR: ST 583 593. **What three words ref:** ///lamp.youths.reclusive

Contact Liz Dagger on: **07740 468 406** (text only please) or E-Mail: **cvhsdagger@gmail.com** for further details.

Nb. Booking not essential, but please do let Liz know if you intend to come along in order to ensure an ample supply of food and drink.



Sunday 7th December 2025. - 9.30am - 12.30pm. **The Birds of Blagdon Lake.**

A guided lakeside walk with Nigel Milborne, Blagdon Lake Warden. (Easy). Limited to 12 places - Booking essential. Contact: Tina Bath on: **07880 664 207**. Text only please. Please dress to suit the weather forecast on the day.

Meeting point: South side of Blagdon Dam, near, Park Lane, East End, Blagdon, North Somerset, BS40 7UL

NGR: ST 504 597 **What three words ref:**/// multiple.pinging.latches



Early 2026. **Beginners and advanced Hedge Laying Training Days. In Tania's Wood.**

Members free, non-members £20 Places will be limited to eight per course and must be booked in advance.

Date and details TBC - for more information, please E-mail: **judith.tranter1@btinternet.com**



Sunday 1st February 2026. **The Mendip Society WASSAIL.**

Details TBC



Saturday 11th April. 10:30am - 1:00pm **The Mendip Society AGM. Followed by our guest speaker, Richard Ellam.**

YOUR chance to have a say in the running of the society. Guests welcome to the talk after official business is concluded for the talk. "Stockton to Crystal Palace". NB. Full details and running order for this meeting will be in the next newsletter.

AT: Draycott Memorial Hall, Latches Ln, Draycott. BS27 3FN.

NGR: ST 473 512. **What three words ref:** //pram.burglars.lightens



Saturday 9th May. **A visit to Batch Farm. Lyncombe Lane, Churchill, North Somerset. BS25 1QH,**

Roger White and Christine Gray are holding a second open day for us at Batch Farm, Churchill. The Mendip Society has supported their efforts in various ways over the years as they develop their land as an educational resource for the benefit of young people and the community generally. This is an opportunity to see and hear about their vision taking shape, and to get an update on their progress. Our previous visit, in October 24 was extremely popular - and places will be limited, so book as soon as possible to avoid disappointment.

NGR: ST 441 589. **What three words ref:** ///trimmer.slice.headstone



Please note that The Mendip Society often organises other walks and events between newsletters that cannot, for obvious reasons, be included here. For the latest information and to be made aware of any late changes please visit **www.themendipsociety.org.uk/walks-and-events**

IMPORTANT NOTICE: Would members please ensure they bring a valid membership card to all events. Organisers will, in future, check membership before starting events in order to be fair to all. Those who fail to show a valid membership card will be treated, and charged, as non-members.

Cider with ~~Rosie~~ Peter!

The west country is famous for cider. Many farms will have had an orchard of cider apples either for their own use or for sale to local cider makers. Most of the latter have either gone out of business or have been taken over by the big producers who, being mindful of quality control, now have their own orchards or will buy only certain apple varieties. Consequently, the sight of apple trees surrounded by fallen apples is all too common. Enter the amateur cider maker.

For cider making apples have three main characteristics: sweetness (sugar), bitterness (tannin) and sharpness (malic acid). Eating apples have high sugar content but are low in the others, cooking apples have high acidity but low bitterness. Cider apples (and there are many varieties with names such as Tom Putt, Brown Snout, Spotted Dick and Frome River) have all three in proportions which give rise to different tasting ciders.



The equipment, with a couple of jars of last year's cider.
Photo: Peter Janes

To make cider, apples must be crushed, pressed and the juice fermented. Traditionally, the crushing was done in a circular stone trough in which large stone wheels ran on an axle around a central post. This reduced the apples to a pulp which was placed in layers with straw or hessian in a large screw press. Fermentation used the yeast naturally present on the apples and was carried out in oak casks. This equipment is beyond the means of the average amateur who must find another way of achieving the same end.



Apples from the scatterer reading for pulping.
Photo: Peter Janes

I buy apples from a local farmer who faces the situation described above. The first step is to cut the apples in halves or quarters so that the scatterer can handle them. This gadget uses toothed rollers to break the fruit into small pieces which must then be further reduced to a pulp; an electric drill with a T shaped blade does the trick (best done outside as bits of apple can fly about). The sloppy pulp is then poured into the press which is lined with a coarse nylon mesh bag. The screw is gently tightened and the juice is collected in a plastic container.

The juice contains natural yeasts and other microbes which may cause erratic fermentation and odd flavours. Therefore, these are killed off with sodium metabisulphite prior to introducing a reliable cider yeast culture. After a few weeks, when fermentation has ceased, the raw cider is syphoned off into one gallon glass jars to mature for a year. This equipment is fine for making 10 gallons or so but for larger quantities one really needs a bigger (powered) juicer and a larger press. In some areas there are community run events where people can bring apples for juicing using equipment which would be too expensive for an individual to justify buying.



Pulp ready for pressing.
Photo: Peter Janes

Unfermented apple juice is delicious but won't keep for long without spoiling. Pasteurisation (rapid heating and cooling) followed by immediate bottling in sterilised containers is necessary if it is to be kept for more than a few days. Home cider making is quite legal so long as you do not sell or distil it. In fact, it is supposed to be consumed by the maker at home, but no-one is likely to mind about a bit of sharing amongst friends.

An Environmental Legacy Gift - and an anonymous donation.

The society has been left a legacy gift of £5,000 from Miss Susan Bates, who wasn't a member, but who loved the unspoilt yet "looked after" look of land in its natural state, one such example being our own Slader's Leigh Meadow.

Some years ago, I met Susan at the Wells Museum, where she was volunteering in the museum garden, along with several of our members. Her vision was for it to become a real wildlife haven, but she wasn't at all encouraged or given free rein in this so eventually decided to "go it alone" and sought out, and bought, a rough, uncultivated field just outside Wookey, where she lived. With some help from a local group, she got the field scythed and set about planting trees, bushes and areas of clumps of wild plants. I well remember trying to dissuade her from transplanting some Meadowsweet from Slader's Leigh, where it was very profuse, (telling her she would rue the day), but to no avail.

At the end of the first year, Joan Goddard, another Society member and I, somehow found ourselves helping at her first 'Open Day'. Her reserve, now called Greenbush was up and running - and she never did "rue the day"!

She left her legacy gift with the wish that we use it for some environmental project in one of the areas that we manage; for which I have suggested the very urgent work needed to pollard the Small Leaved Limes at the top of Slader's Leigh, which were last done twenty years ago.

They are now bursting out of their protective fencing as well as gaining so much height they are at the mercy of the high winds we seem to be having far more of nowadays.

Watch this space for a call for volunteers for a work day there - and remembering the generosity of Susan Bates.

Judith Tranter, Slader's Leigh Reserve Manager



*"Greenbush". A recent picture.
Photo: Joan Goddard.*



*"Greenbush". A recent picture.
Photo: Joan Goddard.*

"In memory of Christopher".

We have also received an anonymous donation simply marked **"In memory of Christopher"**. The management committee have decided that it would be appropriate for this to go towards the 2026 Ebbor Gorge grant, for the important ongoing excavation work at Gully Cave, led by Professor Danielle Schreve.

We are told that:

"Christopher had a deep love and appreciation of the Mendip Hills from an early age. He had a great interest in all aspects of the area which led to him having an encyclopaedic knowledge of its landscape, archaeology, geology, history, caves, mines, quarries and natural history. A kind and decent man he is much respected, loved and missed."



*Gully Cave excavations in progress.
Photo: Annie Egginton.*

A tribute to the late Dave Parker - By Les Davies

I received the sad news that Dave had died whilst I was away in Scotland with the University of Georgia USA this July. It started me thinking about the frailty of life and that we all have a time when our work here is completed. For some that comes sooner rather than later. I think that Dave had achieved so much in his time with us and I have so many fond memories of my time with him. This short tribute leaves so much else to be said, but I wanted to share some personal thoughts of a man who I knew for a long time.

I first met Dave in his Ranger days on the 'Hill'. Ranger number 30 and with a fixed radio call sign of 'Hotel', he was a man with a passion for the countryside and its access. His knowledge of the Public Rights Of Way, (PROW) system was second to none. He was the leading light in a PROW survey that was carried out throughout what was then the Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, (AONB). His passion overflowed into his written reports and there were many occasions when I had to edit some surveys in the spirit of diplomacy before sending them to the relevant Local Authority.

He and Margaret literally walked every path and track in the area, whilst for many years his dining room table was not his own, being given over to the mass of paperwork generated by his ceaseless work. His love of steam trains and the distant days of the Great Western Railway was reflected everywhere in his house and around his well kept garden. He even had a station masters hut in the garden, together with a mass of signs and other memorabilia.

On leaving the AONB Rangers he took up the role of Rights of Way officer with the Mendip Society. It was through his enthusiasm and boundless energy that the signage on Mendip was so good. Dave, his haversack, signs and hammer were everywhere making sure wherever possible people knew where they were going.

He was a family man, a good Husband, Father and Grandfather who instilled in his family the same countryside passion he held. He's gone now, having stepped gently from this life into the next, but he will never be forgotten by the many people who knew him so well.

The photo was taken during a Volunteer Rangers training day on Exmoor during 2004. Dave and Margaret are on the left of the picture. Take a look at that long arm appearing to be that of the late Chris Sherring.... Mr Tickle or what!!



A Presidents' View.



Yes, autumn is here and by the end of October we start going into winter. I always hold the hope that some fine weather could still be with us and make those winter months somewhat shorter... I live in hope!

Despite the change of seasons things are still very busy with the society. Harvest homes will now have been completed to celebrate and give thanks for a good season, which considering the weather has turned out well. The apples are still to come into the mills, with the late but timely arrival of rain has helped put a little weight onto the harvest.

The societies presence at the annual Mendip Ploughing match does not go unnoticed. Its through activities like this that the value of the society within the rural community gets seen. Again just the very best of days in a rural setting. People go there because they want to. They have to make time to visit and catch up with everyone else and as always where does the time go when your enjoying yourself?

I've recently given a short talk at the Burrington Church harvest home and my theme was farming. With out farming we couldn't produce the amount of food we need. Being a hunter gatherer community wouldn't fit into today's world. While the rest of us earn a living its less than 1% of our population produced daily the food we eat.

With November come the remembrance parades to honour those who gave their lives that we might all be free. In a world that seems increasingly unstable , I think it important that we realise the horror that those who went through those times had to suffer. To this, I leave you with a poem from the First War poet Siegfried Sassoon. He's buried in Mells church yard so I think this is quite fitting. Simply titled; 'Suicide in the trenches'.

I KNEW A SIMPLE SOLDIER BOY WHO GRINNED AT LIFE IN SIMPLE JOY.
SLEPT SOUNDLY THROUGH THE LONESOME DARK AND WHISTLED EARLY WITH THE LARK.

IN WINTER TRENCHES COLD AND GLUM, WITH SHELLS AND LICE AND LACK OF RUM
HE PUT A BULLET THROUGH HIS BRAIN. NOBODY SPOKE OF HIM AGAIN.

YOU SMUG FACED CROWDS WITH KINDLING EYE
WHO CHEER AS SOLDIER LADS MARCH BY
SNEAK HOME AND PRAY YOU'LL NEVER KNOW, THE HELL WHERE YOUTH AND LAUGHTER GO.



Finishing on an optimistic note , this edition's photo is of me ploughing in 1975.... That's 50 years ago!!

My kindest regards, Les.



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

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