

Retrospect

Issue No 28, July 2025

Newsletter of the Friends of
King John's Hunting Lodge

News, views and events



Friends and members of the former Axbridge Archaeological and Local History Society, we really would like to hear your views, comments, and suggestions for the future (see more in a note below), and we need articles for *Retrospect*. So send your ideas to Liz by email at moorlandfm@btinternet.com or contributions to editor Ian Tabrett at tabrett.cross@btinternet.com

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DIARY DATES

Wednesday 16 July: *Blackmoor Farm and Chapel, Cannington.* The Dyer family's 15th century Grade 1 listed manor house and chapel, retaining many of the period features including oak beams, stone archways and huge open fireplaces. Minibus will pick up in Cross and Axbridge..

August: No meeting but **Saturday 16 August, 11.30am::** Axbridge and District Museum Trust invite Friends to a coffee morning at the Almshouse, Axbridge

Wednesday 10 September: Visit to National Trust property as guests of Museum Trust. FULLY BOOKED

Wednesday 17 September CMH 2.30: *Historic postcards given to our museum.*
Talk by John Page

SO...WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM US?

Those are (more or less) the words of the 1994 number by Pink Floyd, and they apply very much to Friends. Your committee tries to keep you entertained and educated with our annual programme of meetings and visits, but we'd like to hear from you to tell us if we're getting the mix right, if there are any topics of local and historic interest you'd like to hear about, and if there are locations or museums you'd like us to arrange to visit.

Please contact Liz Scott with your ideas as soon as possible. Planning for our 2026 programme is under way but there's plenty of opportunity to incorporate your ideas. As words say later in that pop song: "*You can have anything you want.*" Within reason...

ART FUND PASS

Museum trustee **Pauline Trapp**, who is schools advisor and liaison officer, writes: "We are now part of the national Art Fund network, and Friends, trustees and stewards are eligible to apply for an annual Professional Art Pass for £35, instead of £62. This is a really positive boost for Friends and timely for the summer. It means we can gain free entry to hundreds of museums, houses and galleries across the country, plus 50 per cent off at major exhibitions and some gallery cafes. We will receive an Art quarterly magazine, an Art map booklet with all the venues, and regular information by email. Those interested should go online and have a look at the website: <https://www.artfund.org/professional/professional-art-pass>
The Art Fund has existed for 120 years, helping museums and people share art and culture.

TIME FOR A COFFEE BREAK



Some of the guests at Axbridge's Almshouse in the latest in a series of coffee mornings organised for Friends by Axbridge and District Museum Trust

ECHOES OF THE PAST



An exhibition of photographs and collected audio memories of Axbridge Methodist Church plus artifacts are on display at King John's Hunting Lodge Museum until the end of July. The material on this historic place of worship was collected by the Axe Valley Men's Shed photographic group, and follows the article on the church, its past and its future, in the January 2025 edition of *Retrospect*. The memories of members of the congregation were recorded after the church's closure in the summer of 2024. **Above**, pictures from the display of the 1901 organ and Peter Drew, organist for around 30 years. And **below**, some of the church's unique set of embossed crockery.



The murky side of Somerset's nursery rhymes

The May meeting, the last talk of the 2024/25 season, took a slightly different format as, with good weather and light evenings, it was moved to the evening and instead of tea and cake, wine and nibbles were on offer. The hall was almost filled to capacity, so from everyone, thank you Liz for your efforts. **Madeleine Roberts** takes up the story of the evening:

The talk was given by Sue Thorne, assisted by her husband Phil, and the intriguing title, *The Darker Side of Nursery Rhymes*, was soon explained as she systematically investigated the origins of some common nursery rhymes.

I suspect that most of us knew that *Ring a Ring 'O' Roses* was to do with the plague



but perhaps not that *Little Jack Horner* might be connected to the Horner family of Mells. Sue explained that at the time of the Dissolution, Richard Whiting, last Abbot of Glastonbury, hoping to appease Henry VIII and save the Abbey, sent his steward Jack (Thomas) Horner to London with a Christmas gift. This was a pie which had hidden under its pastry crust the deeds of 12 manors. Jack is said to have opened it and removed the deeds of Mells Manor. True or not, Thomas Horner took up residence at the manor shortly after, and the family remained there until late in the 20th century.

They always claimed that Mells Manor was bought with others plus nearby farms for the sum of £1,831 9s 3³/₄d and that the rhyme had nothing to do with their ancestor. The story that the deeds were hidden under the pie crust isn't so preposterous, as highway-men were common at the time and travellers often hid their valuables, perhaps sewn in the folds of ladies' underwear or even in cakes or under pie crusts.

Top: Jack and the pie as illustrated in *Lavender's Blue – A Book Of Nursery Rhymes*, published by Oxford University Press in 1954. Right: Mells Manor



Jack and Jill is another well-known nursery rhyme that may be connected with Somerset. Kilmersdon makes a claim to this story, and it does have a Jack and Jill Hill (**below**) up which an annual race takes place to commemorate the event. But who knew that Jack and Jill (or Gill) – **pictured right** in a nursery rhyme book published in 1791 – were in fact a married couple and not two children? It also seems possible that their orphaned child, brought up in the community, was the origin of the name Gilson, which is common in the area.



Baa Baa Black Sheep was a rhyme associated with the imposition of the wool tax in the 13th century. *Rock-a bye Baby* may refer to the idea that a baby was smuggled into the birthing room to ensure a Roman Catholic heir for James II. *Mary Mary Quite Contrary* could be Henry VIII's daughter Mary (Bloody Mary) and the torture of Protestants that was instituted during her reign; *Goosey Goosey Gander* may be associated with the persecution of Roman Catholics and the need for priests to be secreted in Priests' Holes while *Ladybird Ladybird Fly Away Home* may be to do with the burning at the stake of Roman Catholic priests.

Oranges and Lemons is a song that followed criminals on the route through London to the execution block, and *Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush* is a reference to the belief that at Wakefield prison, female prisoners took their exercise by walking around a mulberry bush; *Lucy Locket* is a ditty associated with a fight between two well know eighteenth century prostitutes.

The first book of nursery rhymes was printed in 1744 and was titled *Tommy Thumb's Song Book* but as Sue asked: "Are these really suitable subjects for the songs we teach our children?"

HORROR IN THE BLITZ – AND INCREDIBLE RESISTANCE

Over the last few months, *Retrospect* has tried to give a glimpse of what the Second World War and its ending in Europe on May 8, 1945, meant to the Cheddar Valley and surrounding areas. So much was going on, and we have been able to give only a snapshot of some of the experiences of local people. We end with a few

reminiscences, a long-forgotten and yellowed confidential report on the Blitz and its victims...and an amazing story of heroic sabotage in Nazi-held Europe that is almost unbelievable but which probably saved lives here in Somerset.

And don't forget, John Page and the team at the King John Hunting Lodge Museum are organising a special exhibition in September and October to mark the 80th anniversaries of VE-Day and VJ-Day. They would warmly welcome your contributions – memories, photos and artifacts. Contact the museum

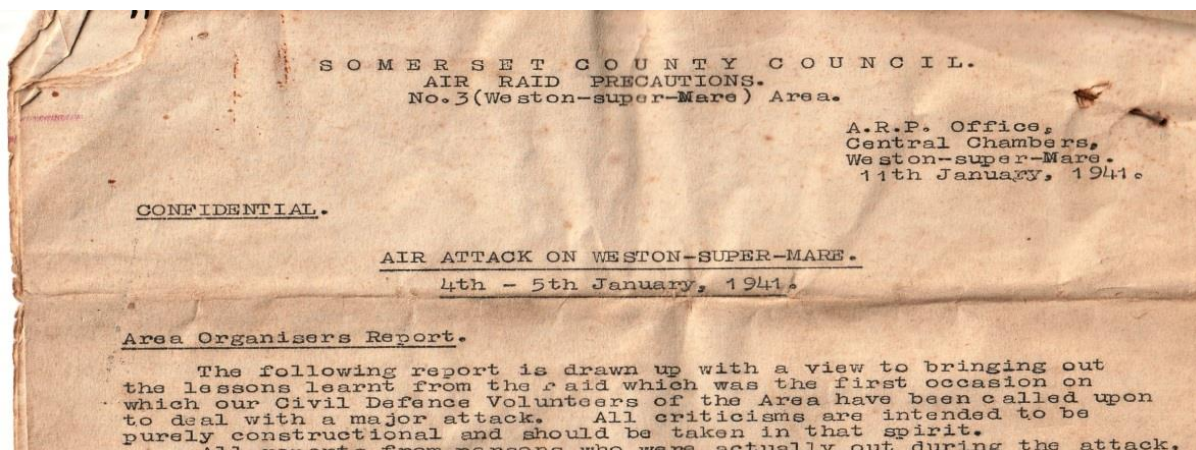
LOCKING

Being so close to Weston-super-Mare and other strategic targets, the war had a large impact on the village and surrounding areas. In 1938 the Air Ministry had bought a large area of farmland to create RAF Locking, where up to 4,000 students at a time could be trained as aircraft technicians. The nearby airfield was also taken over and the main road was straightened and widened so that aircraft manufactured at the new Bristol Aeroplane Company factory at Elborough could be towed there for flight testing.

Locking's informative heritage website says the war united villagers in a common effort. A savings group raised £23,000 (equivalent to £148,378 today) for the war effort, plus £1,500 (£6,500 today) for Warships Week. A model warship was towed around the village to encourage donations. There was a Civil Defence volunteer group, two public air raid shelters - one at the western end of the village and the other in Old Banwell Road – and a barrage balloon was tethered near the Hutton road, with Locking Vicarage as base for the operators. In 1946 the vicar was appointed chaplain to 200 German prisoners of war interned at Knightcott camp.

WESTON-SUPR-MARE

The resort suffered several devastating raids in 1941 and 1942 in which more than 150 were killed and hundreds injured. A large part of the town centre and the Bourneville housing estate were left in ruins. A long-forgotten and yellowing confidential report on the lessons to be learned was drawn up by the Air Raid Precautions (ARP) area organiser, Stanley Rowe, for Somerset County Council.



ARP wardens were volunteers who patrolled streets, enforced the blackout, and assisted with air raid precautions, including distributing gas masks and guiding people to shelters. In his report, Mr Rowe reflected on the "courage, devotion to duty and efficiency" shown by all the emergency services. "It is gratifying to realise that the long period of training, lectures, exercises etc. have proved their worth and that

the long hours of duty so freely undertaken by ARP volunteers have at last earned the much-deserved but somewhat belated appreciation of the general public.”



Utterly devastated: the aftermath of a bombing raid at the junction of Weston High Street and Waterloo Street (*Archant/Weston Mercury*)

Of the attack one January night in 1941, the type-written report says it began with the dropping of incendiary bombs, but these were “extinguished with commendable alacrity” by wardens, police and fire services but also by members of the public “in a manner deserving of the highest praise.” Incendiary bombs which fell on open land or the coast were left to burn themselves out, with the result that the German bombers aimed at those areas with their high explosive bombs without damage or casualties on the ground.

In the sobering final pages, Mr Rowe noted “great difficulty and trouble was experienced in identifying those killed” so that an accurate list of the casualties could not be issued until some days later. He recommended that to ease the situation, everyone should wear identity discs. He also concluded that ambulances should not be used to carry the dead but should concentrate on living casualties.

He concluded: “The raid has made me proud to be associated with members of the ARP organization: we face the future with determination, resolution and confidence.”

WINSCOMBE

In a very welcome contribution to *Retrospect* entitled *Winscombe at War*, **Lois Brenchley** looks at “the momentous occasion when the Allied troops assembled in the West Country to depart on an almighty effort to push back the enemy from invading our country and the very real threat to our freedom. You may think that

Winscombe played little part, but this was far from the case. The war was fought on many fronts and, along with every other community in the country, parishioners here were fully involved in the war effort.

“Winscombe Fire Service, newly formed in 1939, was called to deal with countless bombing incidents, including making many journeys to help with the devastation caused in Bristol. There was also a 50-strong Home Guard unit made up of tradesmen, farmers, businessmen and veterans from World War 1. At what was then a Weston and District Gas Company showroom at the foot of the approach road to



Winscombe railway station (above), a machinegun was placed in an upstairs window so that in the event of invasion, it could fire on the nearby branch line. Inside, members of the WI made jam and bottled fruit and vegetables gathered on a large scale from local gardens, allotments and hedgerows. The finished products were picked up by the Ministry of Food and sent to the troops to provide much-needed vitamins.

“Large numbers of children were evacuated to Winscombe, and the school was stretched to bursting. Mooseheart, on the Banwell road, was taken over as accommodation by Battersea Polytechnic for its classrooms and workshops, plus Sidcot School. In the run-up to D-Day, British troops were billeted throughout the village while American servicemen were accommodated in what was then Birds Assembly Rooms and some of the larger nearby houses. Lois notes: “The ‘Yanks’ caused havoc with the local lads at British Legion dances held on Saturday nights at the Drill Hall that once stood in Woodborough Drive, but were very popular with the local girls!”

“The troops practised firing on Sandford Hill, and as D-Day approached, a pupil watching from the windows of Sidcot School made a diary note of how he saw end-to-end convoys of tanks, jeeps and lorries moving down the A38, while planes towing gliders flew overhead. The following day, the village was empty and quiet.”



Above: At war's end, the centre of Winscombe was lined with crowds to watch a victory parade. Below: a VE-Day fancy dress party at Cheddar



AND FINALLY...

From Highbridge comes a remarkable report of a raid by German bombers when a large number of incendiaries were dropped around the area. An elderly resident, then a teenager, later recalled that many did not go off, and the next day an Army disposal team arrived to deal with the situation. She said: "They took one of them apart and found a note. The bombs, assembled using forced labour in Czechoslovakia, had been sabotaged and the note said: 'This is all we can do for you.'" Just how many lives were saved by that heroic act of defiance against the Nazis we will never know.