Retrospect

Issue No 44 November 2026

Newsletter of the Friends of
King John's Hunting Lodge
Museum

News, views and events

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Articles and pictures for use in *Retrospect* are always most welcome – and needed – so please email the editor

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DIARY DATES

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.**Wednesday November 18 Cross Memorial Hall (CMH), 7.30pm** - Folk singers Issy and David Emeney, from Biddisham. Bar, light refreshments. Tickets £5 Friends, £10 visitors, now on sale. Contact Liz.

Friday December 11, 7pm - *Christmas dinner and quiz.* The Lamb, Weare. Please confirm attendance to Liz – see below.

Wednesday 20 January 2027, CMH 2.30pm – *talks by Fiona Torrens Spence and David Roberts*. Tea and mince pies

Wednesday 17 February, CMH, 2.30pm – *Banwell Bone Cave*. Talk by John Page following annual committee elections

WATCH THIS SPACE…

… for details of our 2027 programme of speakers and visits which will appear here in the December edition. We think it's interesting and exciting, and we hope you do, too.

…AND LOOK ON *PAGE 7* FOR OUR CHRISTMAS DINNER MENU NEXT MONTH AT THE LAMB INN, WEARE. Bookings and menu choices to Liz.

YES! WE REALLY ARE THE GOLD TOP…

The media release issued to the world said it all: “The Collections Trust is delighted to announce that the winner of the 2026 CT Award is Axbridge and District Museum (King John’s Hunting Lodge), for their project *Winthill and Star Roman villas and Hay Wood; the repackaging and better understanding of three significant archaeological collections.*

“Each year, the CT Award showcases some of the often-unsung collections-management projects happening in museums across the UK. This year’s award called for case studies on the theme of accountability for collections – being accountable for collections is key to maintaining public trust in museums, but it is also a necessity for managing and using objects effectively.

“The aim of this winning project was to re-pack three significant archaeological collections to current museum standards, create a full list of objects in those collections, to help improve the catalogue, knowledge and interpretation of the collections.”

The competition for the award was open to around 200 museums all over the country, including the three other – much larger – finalists: the Royal Albert Memorial Museum and Art Gallery; the Royal Welch Fusiliers Museum; and the Tank Museum. It comes with a £1,000 cheque to be used towards a similar future project.

The CT reported: “Award judge Samantha Johnson, head of collection care for the Arts Council Collection and a Collections Trust board member, said: ‘Axbridge and District Museum’s application stood out for the exceptional impact achieved by a small team of dedicated volunteers backed by a modest funding grant. By successfully tackling a significant archaeological documentation and repackaging backlog while upskilling volunteers in collections management and research, this project serves as an outstanding case study in sustainable collection care for resource-limited museums.’”

Our curator **Lucy Newman** guided the volunteers for 18 months as they worked on the huge number of finds from the three sites. She oversaw their careful sorting and repackaging, and undertook all the necessary recording and documentation that had to be done. In a video presentation for delegates at the award ceremony, she describing the hard work involved and later said: “We were thrilled to hear the news that we had won this award. Our volunteers are so pleased, we did not expect this at all! This will make such a difference to the work we do.”

In the video she spoke of the difficulties and complexities of what had to be done to transfer the finds from the packaging in which they were stored in the 1950s, 60s and 70s – in a very chaotic manner in things like old cigar boxes, random plastic bags, shoe boxes and even 70-year-old boxes which had held vehicle parts, she said – to modern packaging. The team also had to interpret the labels and archaeologists' sometimes cryptic notes of where the objects were found on the various dig sites.

Lucy and the volunteers had to deal with a large quantity of finds including pottery sherds, metalwork, flints, painted wall plaster, roof tiles, glass fragments, decorated stonework and fragments of several quern stones which had been used to grind corn for the Star villa's kitchen, and even fragile snail shells. There were human remains – including several infants which needed specially-sensitive handling – and from that cooking and working area, animal bones and organic matter such as burnt corn. Thanks to the project, it will now be much more easily accessible for future researchers.

As an enthusiastic footnote, Rachel Bellamy, museum development officer at Museum Development South West,, said: "Wow, I'm so pleased for you!! Your project has been fantastic, and the Collections Trust award is so well deserved. It was very exciting being able to go online to see you and your fabulous film!"

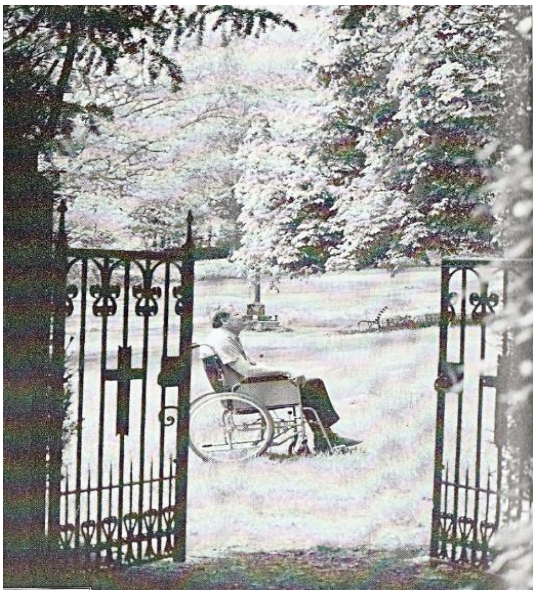
FOR THE RECORD…

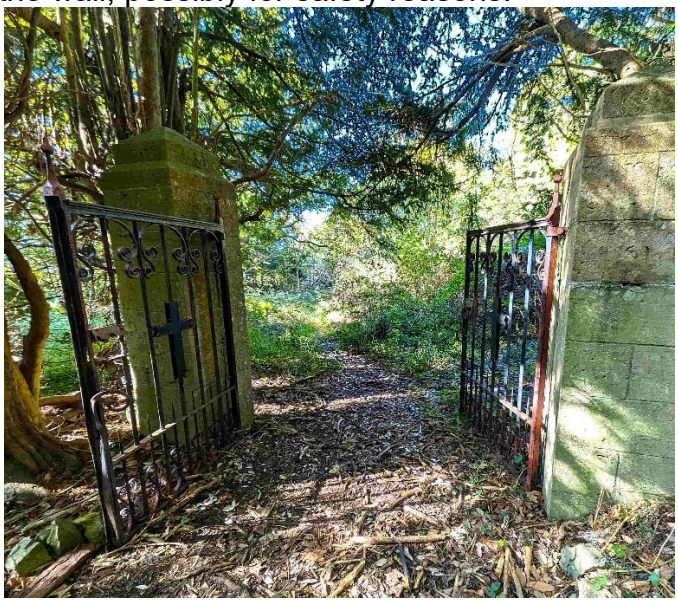
No, this isn't Cheddar Reservoir in the summer of 2025 but in mid-October 2026 before the rains came

SO…IT'S THE LONG HAUL FOR ST MICHAEL'S

The article last month on the past, present and future of St Michael's home on the outskirts of Axbridge created a good deal of interest and has brought more welcome details from the family trust which now owns the site. A representative told *Retrospect*:

"A long-term goal we would like to achieve is to restore the graveyard to how it once was as pictured in the article. Many years of neglect by the Leonard Cheshire organisation has seen it turn into a barely-reachable overgrown mess, 10ft high in brambles. It's a crying shame that it was left to get so bad, as it will now need an army of people to tackle it. Many of the gravestones were just leant against the wall, possibly for safety reasons."





Above: the cemetery then and now. Below: the attractive stone-lined path that leads to those gates…and the jungle that's just beyond them, smothering 170 graves

The spokesman for the trustees added: “We have done some work on the roof of the chapel to stop the ingress of water and keep it dry, and in time we will tidy up. Our workman has also been busy lime-pointing various stone work that was crumbling. Obviously projects like this are extremely expensive, so we are looking at possible ways to help fund the restoration of the main house and all the other buildings and grounds.

“The place would make a fantastic wedding venue, especially as it has its own chapel, but that is something we won’t be doing as it would be far too big a project to complete and run. An option is to keep it as it is with guardians in place using the old rooms for accommodation to help bring in the vital revenue for the restoration. Another would be to convert it into apartments, which we wouldn’t want to do as it’s just not viable because of the vast scale of the building and the work that would be needed.

"Running it as it has been, with no issues over the past three years, seems to have worked well, with gradual improvements to the whole site over time. But for the long-term and viability of it all and to protect it for future generations will have to involve some careful planning with a sensible and balanced approach to make it sustainable and help fund the massive amount of restoration work required. It's all very exciting, but we're here for the long haul and always open to ideas to overcome the neglect it has suffered over the past five years.

"We are very mindful that although we are the owners, we are only the custodians as it has been a huge part of the Axbridge community for many decades – and we wish that to continue."

The spokesman said five generations of his family have lived in the area, some working or volunteering at St Michael's, while he himself spent many weekends as a child meeting residents and going out on trips with them. They all felt very connected to the establishment and had many happy memories of it. However, he added: "One thing is certain - it's no longer suited or fit for purpose of a care home, which is a great shame."

As a footnote, **Ian Tabrett** writes: "*Having visited St Michael's and its grounds to take new photographs I can see that in its heyday it must have been a haven of beauty and peace, somewhere wonderful to be cared for, to recuperate or to spend your life in tranquility. We can but hope that one day it can be returned to that happy state."*

HOW ABOUT A ST MICHAEL'S VINEYARD…?

Friends member Yvonne Bell learned quite a lot about St Michael's from last month's R*etrospect*, and she had this to say:

"I enjoyed reading your very informative article about this property, with such a lot I hadn't realised before....that it had a chapel with a residence for its incumbent minister; a cemetery; it's own farm and animals; and that structure by the gate to receive deliveries.

" When it was a Cheshire Home, I spent an evening there giving a talk as part of a group of three of us who staged an Edwardian evening. The others were singer MichaelHase and Rupert Bottomley, history master and head of Latin at Sidcot School, who played cello. It was a lovely evening which everyone seemed to thoroughly enjoy.

"It will obviously cost a huge amount to get the buildings back into good order. I have often thought a vineyard would prosper right along that slope of the Mendips with hotter summers, and I realise there once was a small vineyard further along the bypass.

"It strikes me that the building could serve in much the same way as a French chateau as part of the vineyard and winemaking. Just needs a bit of imagination and a whole load of money to see the possibilities! Think what fun it would be to have our own local vineyard - we might all be able to purchase a line of vines…"

THE NOSTALGIC MEMORIES OF ‘MR MENDIP’

He isn’t just a Somerset man, he’s a born and bred Man Of Mendip: Les Davies MBE, speaker at our October meeting, who enthralled the near-capacity audience with memories and Brownie Box camera snaps of growing up on a farm and retaining contact with the earth and environment throughout his busy life. He’s pictured **left** with one of those photos of him then, and now in Cross Memorial Hall some 70 years later. It was a hard life in his early days – lifting 17-gallon churns filled with milk from Shorthorn cows, learning to drive an early paraffin-fuelled Ferguson tractor, making hay, harvesting oats, gathering potatoes from the mud, and vegetables to be taken by lorry to customers in Bristol. He spent 18 years in the Army, became senior warden for the Mendips, and for half-a-century has built up an unrivalled knowledge of apples, apple trees and making cider. And Les is determined to pass on his view of a bygone life to today’s generation. He had on sale his book *Follow The Plough*, and he generously donated part of the proceeds to the King John Hunting Lodge Museum.

The Lamb at Weare Christmas Menu 2026

Starters £6.95

Nachos with homemade chilli beef, sour cream & homemade salsa.

Traditional prawn cocktail.

Goats cheese and pear salad (V).

Brussels pate served with homemade chutney, salad garnish & warm toast.

Mains £18.95

Roast Turkey served with all the Christmas trimmings.

Glazed gammon with homemade whisky and mustard sauce.

Homemade butternut squash & mushroom shortcrust pastry tart (V).

Homemade smoked fish & leek gratin.

All served with roast potatoes, honey glazed parsnips, cauliflower cheese, carrots & a special Christmas sprouts mix with cashew nuts & peas.

Desserts £6.95 (V)

Christmas pudding & mini mince pie served with custard.

Homemade baked ginger & white chocolate cheesecake served with cream.

Mulled wine baked fruit, served warm & topped with crème fraiche.

Homemade chocolate orange brownies topped with vanilla ice cream.

Note from the Lamb Inn: we use the following in our food preparation: celery, cereals containing gluten, crustaceans, eggs, fish, lupin, milk, molluscs, nuts and peanuts. Please ask if you require any help. Some of our dishes can be adapted to suit special dietary requirements, please ask in advance of booking.
(V) suitable for vegetarians.