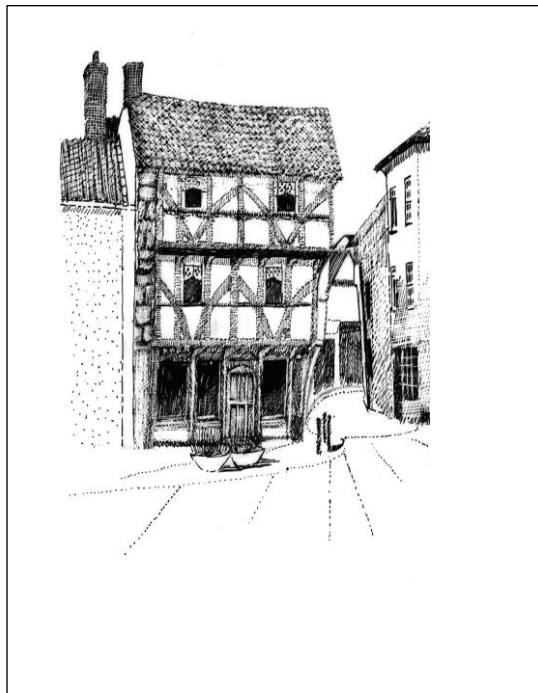


Issue No 6

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Retrospect

Newsletter
of
The Friends of King John's Hunting Lodge



News, Views and Events

Museum charity no.

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Welcome to the 6th edition of Retrospect the paper of News, Views and Events for the Friends of King John's Hunting Lodge and formerly AALHS. To help us to co-ordinate your News and Views and indeed future Events we would love to have an input from you by the **20th of the month** to be included in the **next month's** edition. We are also interested to hear feedback about our talks, in particular Enjoyable?, Subject? ,Time- afternoon or Evening ?, Cost? - feedback to Liz at moorlandfm@btinternet.com:

We are delighted to welcome Ian Tabrett as Editor of Retrospect in the future. Many thanks for an excellent job to Madeleine Roberts who has Edited since March.

Ian has been a resident of Cross for 52 years, has spent all his working life either writing and editing for local newspapers, magazines and television news both with BBC and ITV.

From an early age Ian joined the Axbridge Caving Group and Archaeological Society in 1955 taking part in digging and underground activities. Ian's principle interest was Society's work at the Winthill Romano-British site, when latterly, work continuing the excavation of the site led to the formation of the Banwell Society of Archaeology. Ian being one of the founder members is now the President. During the 1960's and 70's Ian took a close interest in the many archaeological activities in Banwell – the Iron Age encampment in Banwell Wood. The riverside villa and mosaic , additional extensive investigations at Winthill and Iron Age burials found at Christon during the construction of the M5.

With Ian's extensive knowledge and expertise we welcome his contribution as Editor and we invite you to send any future items for Retrospect direct to Ian on tabrett.cross@btinternet.com.

Reminder we now have 5 more social gatherings before Christmas, full details as listed below.

Looking forward to meeting again soon.

Liz

Programme of Events

Wednesday October 18th.

The Strawberry Line Past, Present and Future.

Speaker: Lois Brenchley

Lois one of the former founding members of the Strawberry Line foot and cycleway provides an in-depth story behind the process of the creation of the Strawberry Line, along with interesting and historic picture records.

Venue: Cross Memorial Hall at 2.00 pm £5 to non members Teas, coffee and Cake available at £2.

Wednesday October 18th.

An invitation to join a social evening of entertainment with the Axbridge and District Museum Trust. See attached invite.

Speaker: John Page

Venue: Axbridge Town Hall at 7.30pm

Wednesday November 15th

Our Sacred Spaces – a power point presentation of various locations throughout UK from N. Cornwall to the Lake District of the spaces we find sacred to us of Pre Christian stone circles and walls.

Speakers: Sue and Phil Thorne.

Venue: Cross Memorial Hall at 7.30 pm £5 non members, refreshments £2

Friday December 8th

7.00pm Christmas Social and Quiz . Christmas special menu at The Lamb at Weare . Ample parking. Please indicate if you would like to attend asap so menus can be sent out , partners and friends welcome.

Contact Liz on 01934733341 moorlandfm@btinternet.com

Monday December 11th

Christmas coffee morning at The Lamb, Axbridge 11.30am. Come and join the Museum Trust for a complimentary Coffee and Mince Pie.

Please let me know if you are able to attend by 8th December tel 01934733341 or email as above

Other Events



Somerset Archaeological & Natural History Society

Wednesday October 25th.

The Revd, Thomas Gould Vicar of Axbridge 1766 - 1796

Speaker: John Page

Venue: The Somerset Heritage Centre, Brunel Way, Norton Fitzwarren. 19.30 – 21.00.

July's Event.

With apologies to David Roberts for not including this article in the September issue.

VISIT TO AVALON ARCHAEOLOGY

19 July 2023



Members of The Friends of King John's Hunting Lodge enjoyed a fascinating tour of the reconstructions at the Avalon Marshes Centre at Westhay. The Centre forms part of the wider peat moors landscape, an area of enormous natural and archaeological significance.

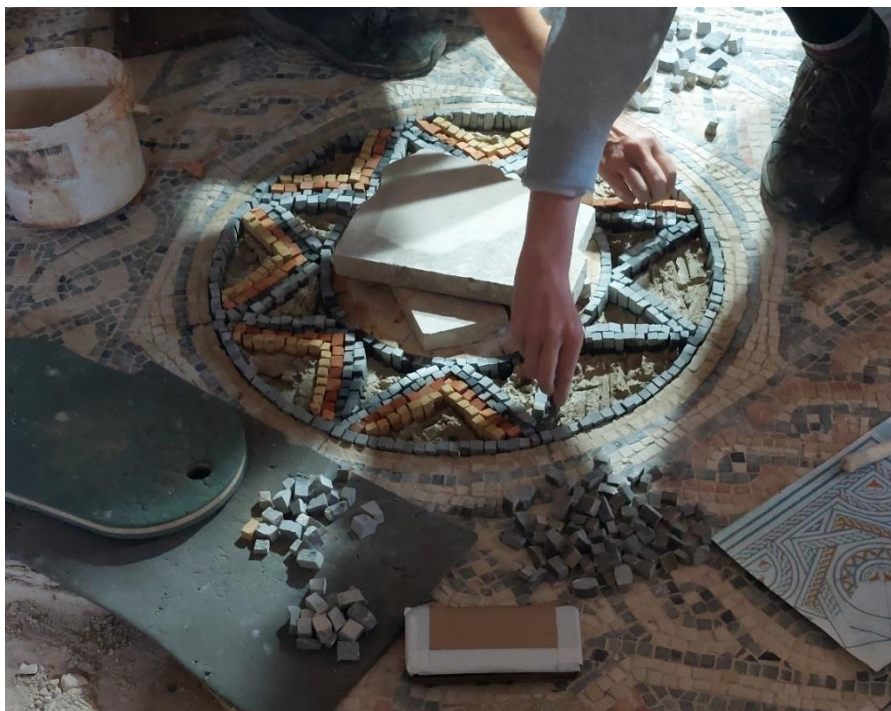
Our excellent guide, Natalie Watson led us on a chronological tour of the reconstructions on site: an Iron Age round house; a Roman dining room; a Saxon Hall; a Viking trading vessel and the excavation hut used by Bulleid and Gray in their excavations of the Glastonbury Lake Village. This hut is now a mini cinema showing clips of the excavations and displaying some of the artefacts recovered by the excavators.

Natalie explained that, while some aspects of the reconstructions were based on clear local archaeological evidence, other elements were based on excavations further afield or on pictures and text in historic documents. Where there was a lack of evidence, the archaeologists had been forced to make deductions based on known techniques and the inherent logic of the methods of construction.

Our first stop was **the Iron Age round house**, still under construction at the time of our visit. This house was based on one of the houses excavated at the Lake Village site. Natalie

explained that, while the first metre or so from the ground was based on evidence, above that level the reconstruction was based on inference and building integrity. The material used in the construction were principally hazel, thatch and wattle and daub. By the standards of most Iron Age round houses, this was a small dwelling, accommodating perhaps ten or twelve people. There was to be a central fireplace but no aperture in the roof. Rather the smoke would have percolated out through the thatch, thus minimising the risk of fire and deterring insects, thus sterilising the roof. Natalie explained that the typical life of this type of round house was about ten years, The fact that the timbers were driven directly into wet ground was a significant factor in limiting the building's life span.

Moving forward in time, we then visited the **Roman dining room**. Outside the building, Natalie explained the working of the hypocaust system and the structure of the walls. We then entered the dining room to examine the mosaic floor which was still under construction and the murals and frescoes. During our visit, a team of volunteers was working on the mosaic, and we were deeply impressed with the skill of those assembling the intricate pattern. The photographs show the work in progress on one roundel and a completed adjacent feature. We also discussed Roman dining culture – eat whilst reclining on one's side.





Whose feet? Can participants identify their footwear?

Our next stop was the **Saxon. Hall** (see initial photo). This impressive building was particularly interesting as it is based on the Saxon Palace at Cheddar, excavated by the late Phillip Rahtz, one of the country's most distinguished archaeologists and long-term president of Axbridge Archaeological and Local History Society. Again, Natalie explained the structure and outlined the aspects that had been drawn from other Saxon structures, from illustrated documents and by inference from this and other buildings. One significant feature of the building is that it is not rectangular, but broader in the middle than at the ends. This seems to create a greater sense of space internally. We discussed the communal and hierarchical functions of Saxon halls, exploring the tales and legends that constituted important parts of Saxon culture. Some of these are illustrated in panels around the Hall. See photo of the panels behind the High Table. At the rear of the Hall, the tale of Beowulf and Grendel is represented, with a realistic example of one of Grendel's claws. A log fire was always a central feature of these structures and, as shown in the photo below, members of the group enjoyed relaxing on benches and, even on a July day, revelling in the warmth of a log fire.



Panels behind the High Table



A fireside chat

The **Viking Ship** (see initial photo) is a replica of a trading ship, scuttled intact deliberately in a fjord as a defensive measure, Warships would have been much longer. The ground level in the photo marks the point at which the original vessel would have sat in the water. Propulsion would have been generated by sails and steering provided by a rudder on the right hand (starboard) side of the stern. The boat would not have had a deck, rather goods would have been stowed in the body of the ship. For Viking sailors, the ship would have been open, with no shelter from the elements. The mast is substantial, and the sails would have been made of wool. At the Avalon Centre, at least in good weather, the vessel serves as a volunteer canteen!

Following Natalie's tour, we had the opportunity to explore the **excavation hut**, with its modern video clips and an otherwise largely untouched working environment. Here it is possible to imagine oneself eavesdropping on Gray and Bulleid as they discussed the evolving story of Glastonbury Lake Village. The visit provided the group with insights into the technology and the culture of various civilisations and communities. We could see how important the landscape of the Somerset moors was to the development of those cultures and we are grateful that organisations such as Natural England and the Southwest Heritage Trust are working to maintain the area and to foster a wide understanding of its significance. Above all, on the day, we really appreciated Natalie's expertise and the clarity with which she related the story of the site, its origins, and the importance of the heritage that it represents.

David Roberts

July 2023.

September's Event.

GEORGE CUMBERLAND - Aspects of a Somerset Life in letters 1800 – 35.

Jane Evans, former curator of Weston Museum, delighted her audience with her entertaining account of George Cumberland's life. He was the younger son of George and Elizabeth Cumberland and lived from 1754 until 1848. He had one brother, Richard, who was two years his senior and it was the correspondence between them that is stored in the British Library, that formed the basis for Jane's research.

The two boys were to take very different paths in life. Richard attended Magdalen College, Oxford before entering the church and later becoming a successful and wealthy farmer. George, by way of contrast, left school at fourteen to work as a humble clerk in the office of the Royal Exchange Assurance Corporation in London. Their father's unsuccessful speculation on the stock market and early death may have contributed to the divergence of the two boys' fortunes. George worked in insurance for fourteen years until a modest legacy from an aunt's

companion released him from employment and enabled him to follow his interests by travelling the continent and collecting art.

Throughout his life, George had the gift of making friends. One such, Thomas Johns, said of him: -

'He was a short, snub-nosed man whose orbicular countenance beamed with the good-natured affection he felt for all his friends and the pleasure he took in everything he saw. He had an engaging spontaneity that the carking cares of domesticity had not been able to quash

Self portrait of George Cumberland
c.1810, aged about 55.

While he had been working in insurance, George had lodged with a Benjamin and Elizabeth Cooper in London. Visiting them three years later, on his return from the continent, he discovered that Elizabeth was being abused by her husband. George decided to come to her rescue, and he absconded with her and her three youngest children, taking them to Rome. Elizabeth Cooper had already had six children with her husband Benjamin, and she was to have five more with George. They never married and George always referred to her affectionately as Mrs C. The coincidence of Cooper and Cumberland both beginning with C was perhaps felicitous.



It was perhaps the need to support eight children that led George to consider farming as a way of increasing his income and an advertisement in 1800 for the sale of common land on Axbridge Hill by the Enclosure Commissioner brought him to Somerset. Chris Richards located, for Jane, the original plot that he bought on the Hillside and also identified further land that he acquired from Lord Bath including thirteen acres at Springhead in Cheddar just below Lion Rock. He had great plans to cross Ryeland sheep with Merino rams to improve their wool. He installed the shepherd, John Meek, in a stable at Winks Well, repaired walls, burnt lime to improve the soil and ploughed some of the land for arable crops. But, in spite of this, he found it hard to make money and, in addition, found neighbouring farmers less than welcoming and helpful. By Easter 1804 he had turned his back on farming and had let his land to Simon Payne one of the local land owners. It was perhaps a hard way to learn that incomers were not welcome on land that had previously been common land. He commented that *'of all trades, that of a farmer, is the most complicated and unfit for a gentleman'*.

By 1806 he had moved to Bristol where he could pursue his interest in art. In earlier times, in London, he had enrolled as an honorary student at the Royal Academy where he made lifelong friends with William Blake, Thomas Stothard and John Flaxman. In Bristol he surrounded himself with a group of amateur artists with whom he went on sketching trips and here he made friends with Edward Bird. A painting of Weston-Super-Mare by George Cumberland

shows the town in 1815 when it had a population of 107 and is described by him as a 'truly pretty village'. See below.



George Cumberland's painting of Weston Super Mare 1815.

There are a number of George's other paintings of the area included in the book. They are of Knightstone Island, Weston Bay looking towards Brean Down, the rear of the Rectory in Weston-Super-Mare where he lived for a while, watercolours of Woodspring Priory and the barn at the Priory and one of Brockley Coombe - a popular picnic spot. Perhaps most remarkable of all is a watercolour survey map of Worlebury that he made in 1805 and which is now in the SANHS collection in Taunton.

In Bristol he became interested in Geology, and this is reflected in the paintings he made of geological features in the area. He was an avid collector particularly of fossils and wrote several papers on the subject that were published by the Geological Society. He was elected an Honorary member of the Geological Society in 1810. He knew Mary Anning and visited her in Lyme in 1820 praising her patient labours collecting and preserving the fossils from the crumbling cliffs in the area. His collection of 4,500 specimens was offered for sale, Cumberland needed the money, however philanthropist James Heyward of the Bright family of Ham Green bought them and donated to the Manchester Geological Society.

George's family was very important to him, and Jane described much of their progress through life. She was particularly interested in his daughter Lavinia who had an interesting medical history but for more information on that you will have to read her book: -

George Cumberland: Farming – Family – Fossils.

Jane's research has illuminated the life and experiences of a complex polymath and this delightful book is a testimony to Jane's time being well spent during covid lockdown. The 150 page book with over 67 illustrations available from office@sanhs.org £15 plus P&P or over the counter at Weston Museum.

Madeleine Roberts.