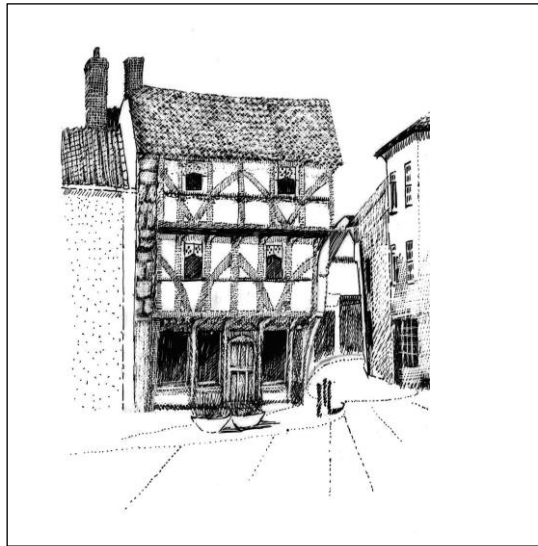


Retrospect

Issue No 11, March 2024

Newsletter of the Friends of King John's Hunting Lodge

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We can be nothing without you, our Friends and members of the former Axbridge Archaeological and Local History Society. We want to hear your views, comments, and suggestions for the future – and importantly, articles are always welcome for inclusion in *Retrospect*. Send your ideas to Liz by email at moorlandfm@btinternet.com and contributions to editor Ian Tabrett at tabrett.cross@btinternet.com

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

March 20: China Comes to Wells. Talk by Dr Oliver Kent on a pottery hoard found in Wells. **Cross Memorial Hall, 2pm; non-members £5, refreshments £2**

Some 30 years ago, the cellar of an old house in Cathedral Green, Wells, which had been renovated in the early 1800s, was excavated to reveal almost 700 pieces of domestic pottery, fine porcelain and glassware. The discovery poses the questions: who amassed the collection, when, and what does it say about trade with China and

life in Wells in the 18th and early 19th centuries? Dr Kent helped to stage a display of some of the finds, in Wells Museum until April 12.

April 17: *The Matthew*, the replica of Cabot's ship. Talk by Clive Burlton
Cross Memorial Hall, 7pm; non-members £5, refreshments £2

...and at King John's Hunting Lodge Museum...

March 29 (Good Friday) doors open for the season, then official opening ceremony **Saturday 6 April 10am** to coincide with Axbridge Farmer's Market.

April, May: Allerton Historical Society exhibition of archive photographs taken over more than a century, with earliest images thought to date from the 1850s. The collection was assembled by residents of Stone Allerton, Chapel Allerton and Ashton, and they are a remarkable record of life and times in the area.



Allerton Villagers in patriotic costume to celebrate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897



Chapel Allerton farmer Arthur William Puddy is pictured in 1919 on the right of a group of soldiers from the multi-national Allied Army of the Orient which served in the largely-forgotten Salonika campaign of World War W1

JOHN CHAPMAN, 1933-2024

Heartfelt tributes have been paid to the lifetime's work in archaeology, caving, local history and the community by John Chapman, who died just a month after making a most memorable contribution to the Friends' January talk on the excavations at Winthill. His passing was announced by John Page at the February meeting, and Liz Scott led the audience in a minute's silent contemplation in his memory. John was a devoted husband, father and grandfather, a highly-skilled engineer, an expert in research and imparting his great knowledge to others, and a great friend to many.



Liz Scott recalls she first met John and his wife Margaret when they were on the management committee at the King John's Hunting Lodge Museum, then run by Sedgemoor District Council. "They were both passionate about the Museum," she added, "they put in hours of work for the Museum and subsequently the Museum Trust. They were a truly delightful couple with such knowledge and passion for the

area.” After Margaret’s death, John became an enthusiastic Friend. “It was such a privilege to listen to him at the Winthill talk and to learn first-hand about the dig and his involvement,” said Liz

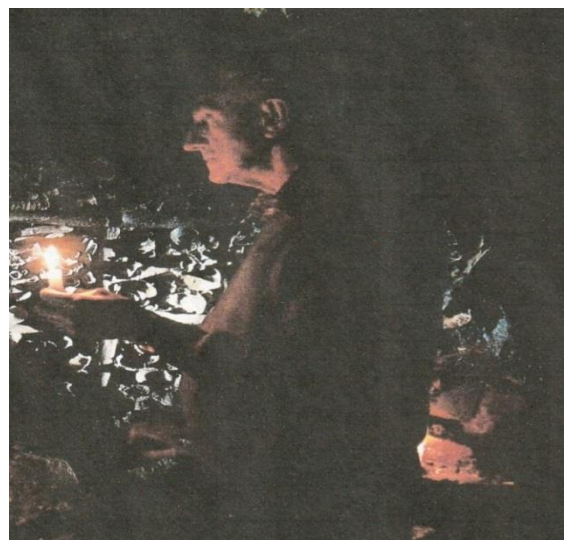
John was born in Swansea but the family moved to Somerset after a German bomb wrecked their property in the Blitz. After completing his National Service, he was employed by the Naval department at the Ministry of Defence as an inspector on the Poseidon and Trident missile production line at the Bristol Aerojet factory at Banwell. He remembered first walking to Winthill as a boy aged 10, then years later taking a



leading part in the 1954-56 excavations (pictured left). David Bromwich very kindly has researched his long career with the Axbridge Caving Group and Archaeological Society which he helped found in 1950, and he was briefly treasurer in 1952. After returning from his National Service he wrote the very first account of the archaeological work at Winthill for the *Journal* in 1955. Being an enthusiastic caver he had already contributed an item on a cave found at Chelmscombe Quarry, Cheddar.

John held the position of caving secretary through the 1960s, then became chairman, a position he last held in 1999. With Professor Mick Aston and Jackie McKinley, he contributed a paper on the radiocarbon dating of finds from Winthill to the Somerset Archaeology and Natural History Society, and took an important role with

Vince Russett on a detailed account of the dig. John wrote *The Story of Banwell Caves*, published in 2011 by the Banwell Caves Heritage Group. In it, he wrote: “I first visited Banwell Caves in 1950 with the Axbridge Caving Group and Archaeological Society [to carry out excavation work] and more recently working with the Banwell Caves Heritage Group in their efforts to conserve both above and below ground in this most important piece of our heritage.” John is pictured by Mark Lumley exploring the cave by candlelight, surrounded by the thousands of animal bones found there and stacked around the walls. John Page says he was the inspiration which drove the huge amount of restoration work carried out in the cave and follies built on the hillside by Bishop of Bath



and Wells George Henry Law, who lived in the main house in the 19th century. In 1824, Winthill farmer William Beard began the exploration work which led to the discovery of two caverns close to Bishop Law's house, including the one containing a vast mountain of bones of bear, buffalo, reindeer, wolf and other prehistoric animals. Beard, dubbed "Professor" by the Bishop, was described as "a reserved man of quaint manners and with a high opinion of his own skill" and he acted as guide to the many visitors to the Caves. He died in 1868 aged 95.



John visits the grave of "Professor" William Beard with Andy Current, from the Natural History Museum, in Banwell Churchyard in 2010 (Picture: John Page)

Museum Friends Phil and Sue Thorne knew John for 50 years or more and they have contributed their thoughts. Phil writes: "I first met John in the early 1970s when he was Captain John Chapman and I was a senior Cadet and member of Cheddar Army Cadet Force. He always had great patience when teaching young cadets Army skills such as map reading, field craft and rifle shooting in our own rifle range under the Cadet hut at Kings of Wessex School, where we could use the playing fields and all of the surrounding moorland for field craft and map reading.



I have this picture of John and his wife, Margaret, which I believe was taken during the first summer of the opening of the West Mendip Way when we walked from Wells, camped overnight at Burrington and the following day walked on to Uphill. You could always rely on John to have his Land Rover loaded with Cadet kit for such camps on the Mendips.

“I vividly remember one annual Cadet camp in Dorset when we had a visit to a Naval Dockyard and had a guided tour when we were led past a missile. The guide told us it was ‘top secret’ and he couldn’t tell us anything about it, little knowing those missiles were made at Banwell and that John was the MoD quality inspector on site so knew every small detail! His job was later moved to the MoD at Bath and he was most sad to have to leave us Army Cadets. But before that, John took us to show us tunnels at Rowberrow Bottom which had been used as secret stores in case of invasion during the war.

“We had many talks about caving and cave digging as, like John, I enjoyed both of these activities. It was fantastic to see him at the Winthill talk .and shortly after, I visited him to lend him a book about various archaeological sites on Malta. We sat drinking tea and eating fancy biscuits with him and his daughter Sally. and of course reminiscing about old times.”

Sue Thorne adds: “John was a wonderful, caring family man and I remember times spent chatting with him, Margaret and the very young Sally and Tom. Of course I heard a great deal about John’s Cadet and caving exploits from Phil as the ACF was a huge part of both their lives. John was very interested in the talk we gave at the Axbridge Archaeological and Local History Society (AALHS) last year and I was humbled that he bought copies of my books and afterwards told me how much he had enjoyed reading them.”

David Roberts, former chair of the AALHS, writes: “John and Margaret were a powerful team, devoted to their children and grandchildren. John was a skilled engineer, with his background in Naval defence, and in retirement he pursued his skills through the Cheddar Modelling group, making some impressive models.

“John and Margaret took a significant part in the Hay Wood excavation and the dating of finds to the Neolithic period. He also made a big contribution to the publication of *Earth Colours*, a study of the Bristol and Mendip ochre industry. As long-serving chair of AALHS, he was always a calm, knowledgeable, reassuring and modest presence, and he made a major contribution to the development of the Museum.”

John Page writes: “I knew John for more than half-a-century, and he had a major influence on my life as he introduced me to the AALHS and the Museum Trust, which have played a significant role in my retirement years. He also cajoled me into becoming treasurer of what became the Banwell Caves Heritage Group.

“In all these enterprises I worked alongside John for many years, and we often had long discussions about what should be done in each. John was chair of the AALHS and the Heritage Group for many years, and his extensive knowledge of the area, and of its many significant people, were a major factor in their ability to achieve their objectives.

“John was such an easy-going man that I cannot remember an occasion when he appeared to be ruffled or agitated, although that doesn’t mean he agreed with everything that happened. He always took life calmly and was always the gentleman, in all the senses of that word.

“I will remember him with affection, and thank him for a lasting and fascinating friendship.”

Ian Tabrett writes: It has been a great privilege to compile this obituary, and my thanks go to the many of John’s friends who have contributed their thoughts and tributes to him. I hope we have done him justice.

THANK YOU, JOHN P!



After more than 20 years as chairman of the Axbridge and District Museum Trust, John Page has stepped down. To mark the occasion and to thank him for all his hard and dedicated work, he was presented with a marquetry picture of King John's Hunting Lodge by Liz Scott at the February meeting of the Friends. The framed picture, which John said would take pride of place in his home, was specially made by Lester Durston (picture: Madeleine Roberts). We will report in the next issue of Retrospect on John's talk on time and time-keeping, especially Axbridge's many clockmakers and their clocks

Back to the days of the really wild west on Mendip-top!



Friends took advantage of an invitation by the Westbury Society to travel by mini-bus, ably driven by Liz Scott, to attend this year's Barry Lane memorial lecture by Professor Danielle Schreve at Westbury-sub-Mendip Village Hall. The subject was *Ice Age mammals on Mendip: caves to conservation*. Prof. Schreve (left), who is about to take up an important post at Bristol University, has led years of excavation, discovery and research in Gully Cave in Ebbor Gorge and at Westbury Quarry. She described huge climate changes which have taken place over millions of years and the way these have affected – and in many cases devastated – the mammals that roamed the Mendip Hills. The world-renowned work that she and her team have carried and continue to reveal evidence of the existence of many here that have long become extinct.