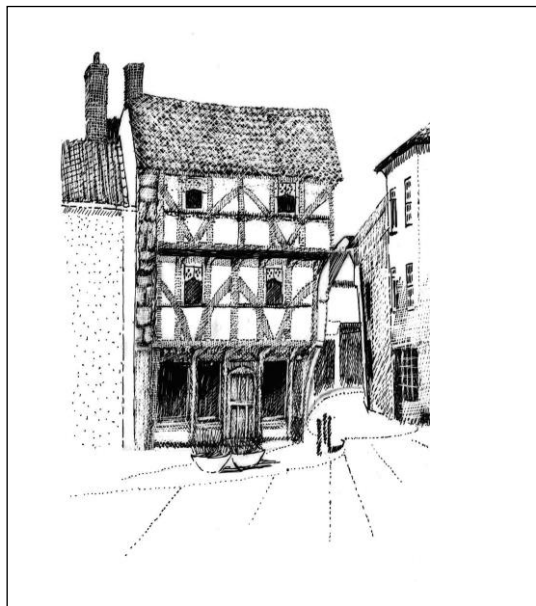


Retrospect

Issue No 13, May 2024

Newsletter of the Friends of King John's Hunting Lodge

News, views and events



We can be nothing without you, our Friends and members of the former Axbridge Archaeological and Local History Society. We really want to hear your views, comments, and suggestions for the future – what talks you'd like to hear, presentations you'd like to see and visits you might like to make. Send your ideas to Liz by email at moorlandfm@btinternet.com. And importantly, articles are always welcome for inclusion in *Retrospect*, so send your contributions to editor Ian Tabrett at tabrett.cross@btinternet.com

Retrospect is copyright Axbridge and District Museum Trust, charity No. 1091161

YOUR DIARY DATES



May 15: Axbridge Church and its hidden treasures, with Stephanie Gall.

Meet at the Church steps, 2pm. For those needing easy and flat access to the church, car parking can be found in Chestnut Avenue.

Donations to the church fund please

Pictured left: the elaborately-plastered and beautiful ceiling dating from 1636 in the nave of St John the Baptist Church.

May 22: **NEW EVENT** – Axbridge & District Museum Trust are inviting all Friends to a coffee morning at the Almshouse at 11.30 am . Please let Liz know by **May 15** if you would like to attend.

June 19: **St Mary's Church, Christon**, with Mary Counsel. A chance to see and hear about features discovered in the church during recent restoration, including wall painting which could be as early as the 13th century. **Meet at the Church, 2.30pm; parking nearby is limited so car-sharing is advised** ***Donation to the Church please***

August 25-27 2029!: that may seem a long time in the future but these are the dates set for the next Axbridge Pageant! The event was due to be held in 2030 but it has been brought forward to the August Bank Holiday week-end in five years' time. The pageant will be staged daily at 3pm to celebrate awarding of the town's charter in 1229 by King Henry III, recognising Axbridge's importance as a market centre.

King John's Hunting Lodge Museum events

May: Allerton Historical Society exhibition of archive photographs.



Celebration of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, Chapel Allerton School, June 1897

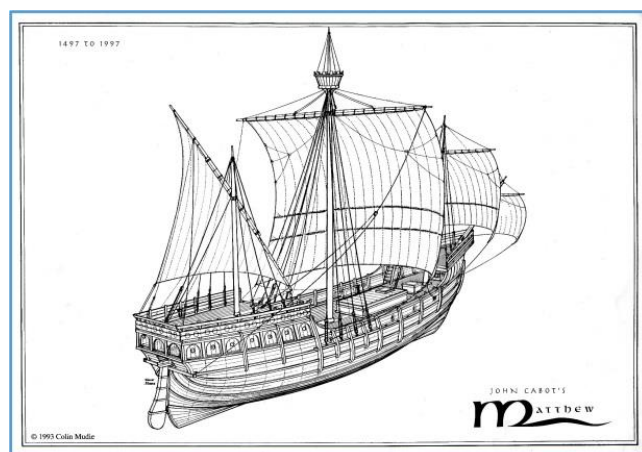
June, July: the museum's collection of clocks made in Axbridge
Remember you can keep up to date with developments at King John's Hunting Lodge Museum through the website <https://kingjohnshuntinglodge.co.uk> then click on Newsletters

ANCHORS AWEIGH, MODERN MATTHEW (AND BRISTOL) FASHION



Clive Burlton gives his presentation on the Matthew to the April meeting of Friends at Cross Memorial Hall

He was hoping to find new lands in the Orient when he set off from Bristol on May 2 1497 in a tiny but sturdy caravel called the Mathew. But while John Cabot, an adventurer originally from Venice, failed totally in that mission, he made history and



ensured his name would be remembered for ever by becoming the first European to cross the Atlantic to discover new lands there: North America. He actually made footfall in Newfoundland, and to mark the 500th anniversary of his extraordinary 53-day voyage, orders went out on both sides of the Atlantic to build a replica of his ship and retrace his route. The problem was that no one actually knew what the original Mathew looked like or how – and when – it was built.

Specialist ship designer and naval architect Colin Mudie was given the task of researching archaeological evidence, contemporary medieval drawings and accounts to come up with what was to be called – according to National Historic Ships UK – not a replica but an “operational representation.” He did, an expert team of 12 shipwrights was assembled with the task of building it in Bristol to his design (above), and the Matthew Trust settled on “faithful representation.”

The finished ship that we see today – able to carry a crew of 20 and a cargo of just 50 tons – was launched in September and after sea trials to the Pool of London and back, set off for Newfoundland on May 2, 1997. Since then the Matthew (now with two masts rather than one on the original) has enjoyed many voyages, featured in films and tv programmes, and visited maritime festivals across Europe.

As for John Cabot and his 15th century Mathew...King Henry VII gave him permission and even funded another expedition with four other ships the following year. He again set sail down the Bristol Channel never to be seen again. Just what happened to the little flotilla sadly no one knows.

All this was told most entertainingly by Clive to the well-attended Friends' April meeting. He also showed a 28-minute video he edited from hours of material shot by BBC West for a documentary series on the project. The ship is now owned by



the charity Matthew of Bristol Trust, which uses donations and profits from public and private charters for vital maintenance work to keep it ship-shape and in Bristol fashion. Clive has been much involved in the whole subject as well as being a renowned military researcher, a trustee of the Bristol Museums Friends' charity, and a director of the not-for-profit publisher Bristol Books, who provided our illustrations of the Matthew and kindly gave a donation from all book sales on the day to the Friends' funds.. **Ian Tabrett**



The Matthew sets off under the Clifton Suspension Bridge and down the Avon Gorge on May 2 1997 on its voyage to Bonavista, Newfoundland

STEAMING BACK TO LIFE

Retired TV cameraman Clive North, who lives on the Mendips with his wife Janet, filmed a documentary with director Andrew Johnston in 1979 to chronicle the rescue of a rusting steam locomotive from a scrapyard. At the time, Andrew's home was near Axbridge, and this account is an adapted version of an article just published in the West Somerset Railway/WSR Association "Journal." The pictures are by Clive's camera assistant, Axbridge resident Tim Chard, whose introduction to rail travel as a boy was catching the Cheddar Valley steam train daily to school in Wells.

Andrew's enthusiasm was stirred by the early rescue of three ex-GWR locos which in their day probably served the line, and returned in a ruinous state to Somerset. He writes:

The railway preservation movement has its heroes but for me, one name towers above all the others: Dai Woodham, the unassuming scrapyard owner who became a legend in railway preservation circles. His decision to retain rather than scrap more than 200 steam locomotives at Barry, South Wales, and his willingness then to sell



them to enthusiasts transformed the entire preservation scene. It's worth remembering that the magnificent GWR locos on the West Somerset Railway all owe their survival to him. Among the early escapees was a trio of Small Prairie Tanks for the infant WSR. I remember reading about their arrival and how they had been transported by a haulier named Mike Lawrence, who was based in Somerset. I was then working as a film editor for BBC West in Bristol, and began to wonder if a television programme about Mike and his locomotive-hauling exploits would be possible. To my great surprise, my boss agreed to let me try as long as it could be done on a shoestring budget. So I contacted Mike, who said he would soon be

hauling another loco out of Barry that we would be welcome to film. It turned out to be the basis of what is now a key member of the WSR fleet, No. 9351 but then in its original form as a large tank engine, No. 5193.

One day in August 1979 we gathered at Mike's farm near Burnham-on-Sea and began filming as a steam-powered winch truck owned by a fellow enthusiast hauled itself onto one of two low-loaders, and the convoy set off for South Wales. Next



morning we arrived at Barry, where there were still more than 100 locos in the yard, stretching row upon row as far as the eye could see. Next to them, scores of mineral wagons were being reduced to piles of scrap, and Woodham had always said that if the supply of wagons dried up, he'd have to start on the steam engines. Fortunately, it never did!

Hauled out of the scrap lines and waiting for us was the 60-ton loco that Mike was about to load. It had been rusting at Barry for 17 years, its chimney was missing, as were many other parts, but its smokebox door bravely bore the message: "Saved at last." We were introduced to Mike's right-hand man, Harry Lee, from Taunton, who had been a GWR fireman and then one of the WSR's first paid employee.

The whole loading operation was planned with military precision, with safety always the first consideration. As

Harry put it: "Anything you touch is liable to take your finger off - it's got no friends." From my point of view the other key player in the operation was cameraman Clive North. We would have to film everything as it happened, with no asking for pauses or retakes. Clive had to record events as they unfolded, but fortunately he had the rare ability to be both quick and creative, so every bit of the action was captured in powerful hand-held shots.



When No.5193 was safely on its transporter we had time to gather atmospheric shots of the less fortunate locos patiently awaiting salvation, while Mike and his crew prepared for the long haul on the motorway. Eventually all was ready and the journey began, with a maximum speed of 30 mph and a fuel consumption of about 5 mpg!



Then it remained for us to beetle off back to Bristol and edit the rushes into a finished film. I was delighted when one of my favourite broadcasters, Johnny Morris, agreed to provide the commentary, and his own love of steam certainly came across. Under the title *One Iron Horse, Handle With Care*, the programme was transmitted by BBC West, and it can now be found on YouTube. It was my first venture into directing, and I would go on to make another 12 films for television on railway heritage.

Just look at me now!



What a difference a few decades make...the rusting hulk that was GWR Prairie tank engine No. 5193 was transformed by the West Somerset Railway to become the unique Mogul tender locomotive No. 9351, here in the sunshine at Minehead station. (Picture: Mike Lanning).

AND FINALLY...reminders for your 2024/25 subs are being sent out now to those who joined before May 2023, and to newer Friends, bi-monthly on your joining date. The Single sub remains at £15 and Couple/Family has increased slightly to £25.
