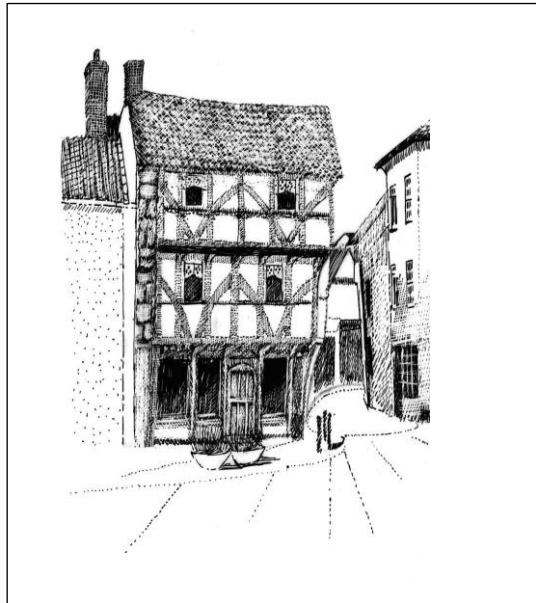


# Retrospect

Issue No 14, June 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 – and importantly, articles are always welcome for inclusion in *Retrospect*. Send your ideas to Liz by email at [moorlandfm@btinternet.com](mailto:moorlandfm@btinternet.com) and contributions to editor Ian Tabrett at [tabrett.cross@btinternet.com](mailto:tabrett.cross@btinternet.com) These will be most welcome, so please get in touch so that we can keep *Retrospect* a fascinating read.

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

## **YOUR DIARY DATES**



**June 19: St Mary's Church, Christon**, with Mary Counsel. A chance to see and hear about features discovered in St Mary's Church during recent restoration, including wall painting (right) which could be as early as the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Her talk will also cover the medieval village of Christon. Refreshments in the form of tea and biscuits will be available.

**Meet at the Church, 2.30pm; parking nearby is limited so car-sharing is advised.**  
***Donation to the Church please***

**July 17: Sandford Station Heritage Centre; 2.30pm**, guided tour with Lois Brenchley as a follow-up to our successful talk on the Strawberry Line. This will be a special tour for just our group so please come along and let Liz know by 12<sup>th</sup> July.



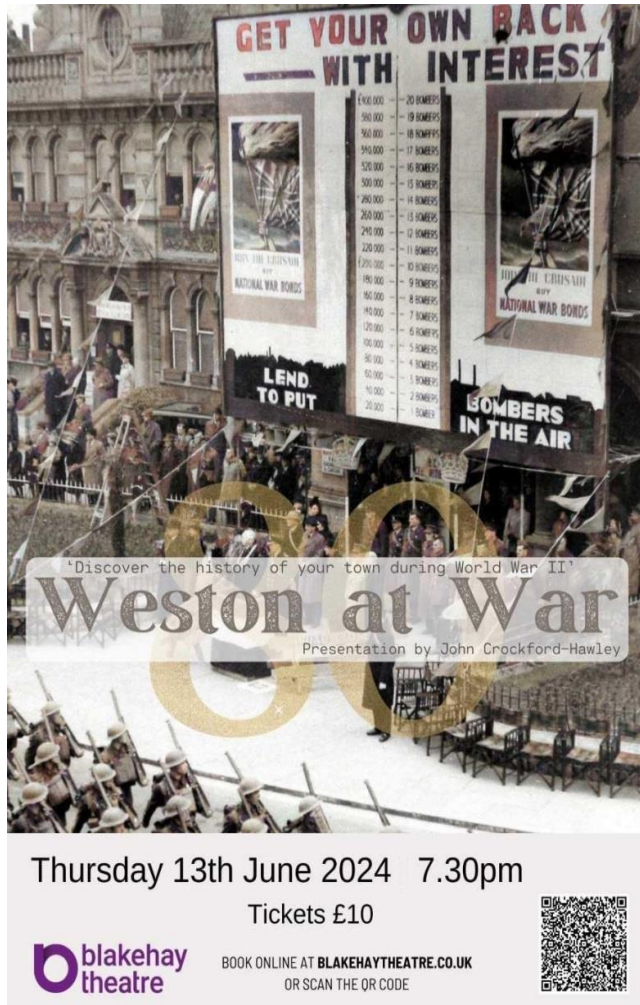
*LEFT: Sandford and Banwell Station when it was still fairly busy with passenger and goods traffic. (Picture: Ian Tabrett)*

**August: No meeting – BUT LOOK OUT FOR YOUR MONTHLY *RETROSPECT***

**September 18: The Churches of Weston-super-Mare**, with John Crockford-Hawley. Cross Memorial Hall, 7pm; non-members £5, refreshments £2

### **King John's Hunting Lodge Museum**

**May.** 10 Friends and Stewards met in Almshouse for coffee and cake as a thank you  
**June/July:** The temporary exhibition will be about time, Axbridge clock makers and the museum's collection of Axbridge clocks.



GET YOUR OWN BACK WITH INTEREST

LEND TO PUT BOMBERS IN THE AIR

Discover the history of your town during World War II

**Weston at War**

Presentation by John Crockford-Hawley

Thursday 13th June 2024 7.30pm

Tickets £10

blakehay theatre

BOOK ONLINE AT [BLAKEHAYTHEATRE.CO.UK](http://BLAKEHAYTHEATRE.CO.UK) OR SCAN THE QR CODE

### **NEW DIARY DATES**

Our September speaker, John Crockford-Hawley, mayor-elect of Weston-super-Mare, tells us he is giving a talk on **June 13** at the Blakehay Theatre, Wadham Street, Weston, entitled *Weston At War*. He will also cover the effects of the Blitz in the area, such as RAF Locking and the aircraft factory at Elborough, Banwell.

On the same topic, John is putting on a large display in Weston Museum Courtyard from **4 to 9 June**.

Tickets for his talk are £10, which can be booked online at [blakehaytheatre.co.uk](http://blakehaytheatre.co.uk)

### **Sad News.**

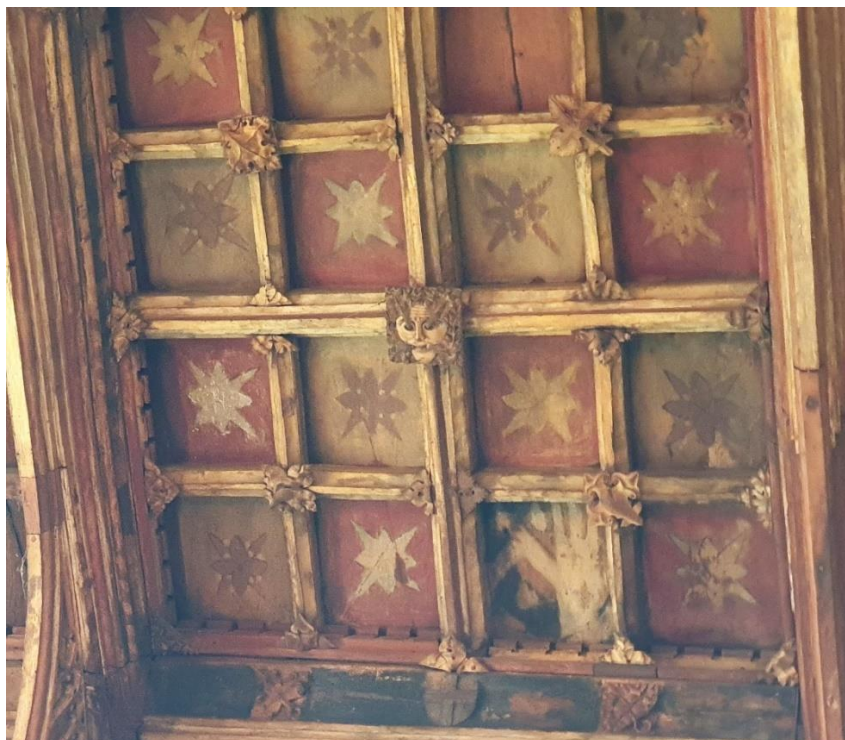
Friends of KJHL will be saddened to learn of the death of Christopher (Chris) Richards at the age of 73. He made a huge contribution to archaeology and caving in the western Mendips and in Weston-super-Mare. He will be sorely missed by friends and colleagues. Our deepest sympathy goes to his family.



## **Visit of The Friends of King John's Hunting Lodge to Axbridge Church**

The Friends of King John's Hunting Lodge enjoyed a fascinating and stimulating visit to the parish church of St. John the Baptist. Ably led by Stephanie Gall, we were able to appreciate the evolution of the church over the centuries. Stephanie explained that work started in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and although many features have been changed over time, elements of the medieval iconography remain. In particular, she drew attention to the wall paintings, their colours muted by time nevertheless convey something of the visually-striking imagery that once illustrated the Bible stories to a largely illiterate congregation. Other medieval features such as the rood screen, were removed during the Reformation, although the access stairways can still be seen.

The beautiful nave ceiling dates from the early 1600s, when plaster ceilings were normally a feature of the private houses of the wealthy. It has been painted in a variety of colours over the centuries and the current celestial blue was put on only in 1969. The designs on the timber ceilings are also striking and Stephanie helpfully displayed details of these on her tablet to limit the strain on visitors' necks.



**The timber ceiling in the north isle showing a green man in the centre.**



**The embroidered altar frontal in the north isle.**

The embroidered altar frontal displayed in a case in the north aisle is the work of Mrs Abigail Prowse. It is dated 1710 and took her 10 years to complete. The embroidery illustrates how the altar was set out for communion. Several prominent monuments to members of the Prowse family dominate parts of the church and relate the sometimes difficult lives of the individuals.



**The Prowse Monument.**

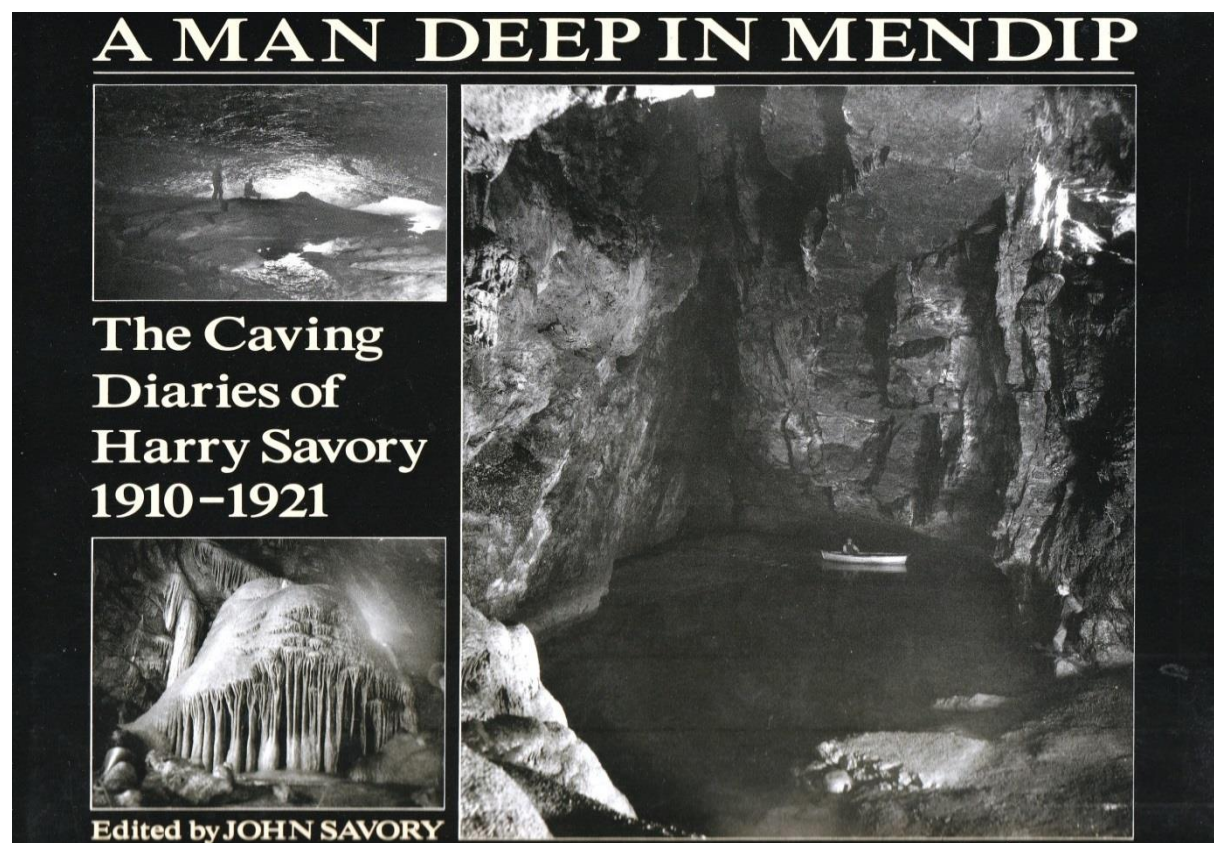


The 19th century saw a considerable restoration of the church, much of it by J. D. Sedding in the Arts and Crafts style. By his design of the window glass, the metalwork screens across the chancel, the pews and the wooden parclose screens, he ensured a unified harmony that greatly enhances the beauty of the building. We were also privileged to be shown two early communion vessels.

Clearly, in the couple of hours that we were able to spend on this tour we were able to look only at a few of the many significant architectural and liturgical aspects of the church. However, Stephanie had selected her topics and themes in such a way that she was able to provide her visitors with a real insight into the life of the church through the ages and into the changing social and cultural context of the nation. Her mastery of her subject matter and her evident rapport with the audience greatly added to our enjoyment of the visit.

**Text: D. Roberts    Photographs: J. Page**

### **REVEALING THE WORLD UNDER OUR FEET**



**Ian Tabrett writes:** The deaths this year of two eminent Mendip cave enthusiasts – John Chapman and Phil Hendy, both keen explorers and conservationists, while Phil also wrote a popular monthly column for the *Mendip Times* – have been sad indeed.

But the discovery in a charity shop of a rare and rather special book has helped shine a light into their domain: *A Man Deep In Mendip*, by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century cave explorer and photographer, Harry Savory.

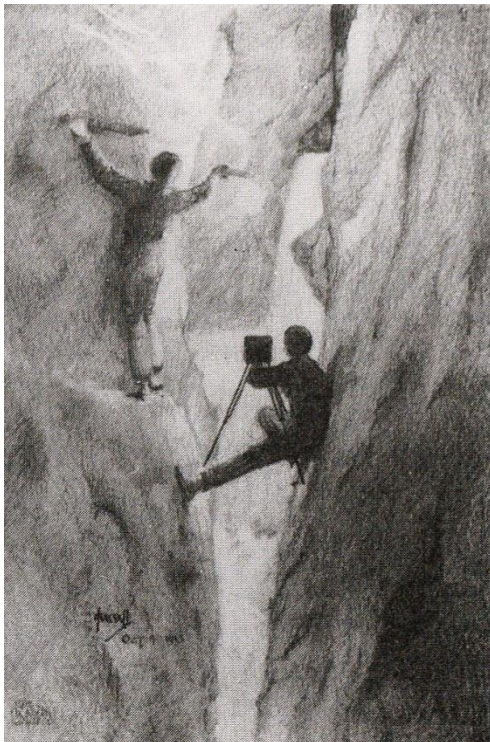
Published in 1989 by his son, John, and long out of print, it describes both the amazing world beneath the Mendip Hills that Savory discovered, and a world and



way of life above ground that has long vanished and is now almost impossible to comprehend. The book is based on diaries kept by Harry (pictured left when he served in the Territorial Army in World War One) and the photographs he took between 1910 and 1921 during his many expeditions on and under the Mendips. He walked many, many miles, cycled, rode his motor-cycle, caught trains and even in those early days of motoring, went by car...Axbridge, Cheddar, Wookey Hole, Wells, Priddy and anywhere in between that offered the

prospect of a subterranean adventure, however easy, difficult or dangerous.

His stamina must have been quite something for he had to take with him his huge and cumbersome glass-plate camera and heavy wooden tripod, chemicals and other equipment to light the caverns for the lengthy exposure his camera required – sometimes up to 20 minutes. Then there was his caving equipment: rope ladders, ropes, shovel, pickaxe, candles and a sandwich or two to keep him going.



At that time he had none of the gear that today's adventurers take for granted: no wetsuit, helmet, lightweight ladders, lights, protective waterproof clothing. He went in his oldest everyday clothes, cloth cap – some of his companions wore trilbies – and hobnail boots, certain in the knowledge that by the end of the day he would be soaked to the skin and covered in mud, and occasionally bloodied. He visited sections of the Cheddar and Wookey Hole caves which were not yet open to the public, and to others which were still being explored, sometimes having to battle through water-filled tunnels to sections being extended either by sheer muscle-power or by explosives.

He saw and photographed countless formations of stalagmites and stalactites long since destroyed by later generations of cavers, by nature or by quarrying, and often included those

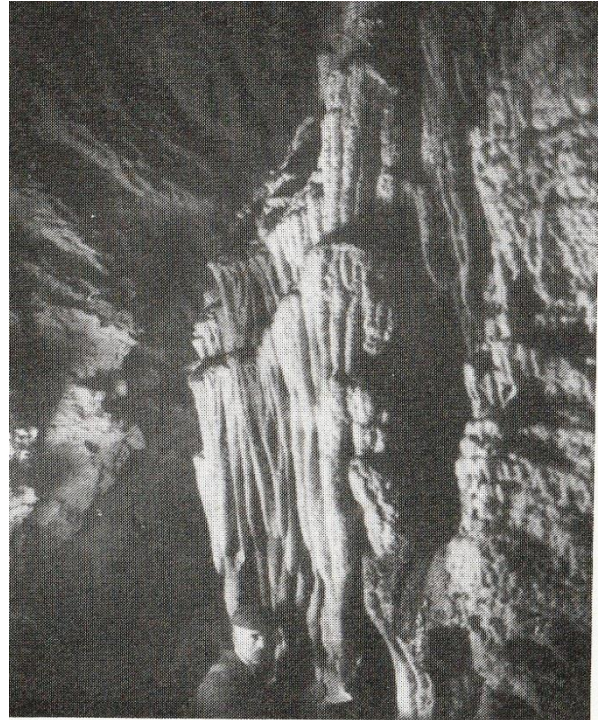
fearless friends who went with him who could be persuaded to stay still like statues until his carefully-framed photos were taken for us to marvel at today. He never abandoned his plate camera while working underground but eventually did accept the new-fangled film cameras to snap subjects in the open air.



The sketch above by a friend shows Harry Savory in Swildon's Hole, near Priddy, in October 1913, and it illustrates dramatically the hazards and difficulties he had in lighting and photographing underground.

On the right, he pictures a cloth-capped friend at the foot of a 30ft wall of stalactite, also in Swildon's Hole.

A wooden box containing scores of Harry's glass photographic plates and handwritten captions are in the Wells Museum collection, while his diaries and other material are held by his old club, the Bristol Spelaeological Society. His great friend was Herbert Balch, the leading figure in Mendip caving who lived all his life in Wells and often accompanied him underground with another well-known contemporary, Ernest Baker. Harry lived and worked in Bristol and gave illustrated lectures until his death in 1962.



**THE WONDERFUL WORLD PHOTOGRAPHED BY HARRY SAVORY**  
**UNDER THE MENDIPS...**





*ABOVE: Swildon's Hole, near Priddy, November 1921. BELOW: "Bacon rasher curtain" in Gough's Cave, Cheddar, February 1913.*



**...AND A LOST WORLD ON TOP OF MENDIP**



***ABOVE: Priddy Fair, August 1916. Harry Savory wrote in his diary: "No side shows, chiefly horses, ponies and sheep – a few pens of the real Mendip sheep, very little and khaki. Old characters still about, many old drovers. Great***



***deal of headgear, everything but a topper to be seen. All the village children in their Sunday best."***

***BELOW: On the same day, a cottage on The Batch, Priddy, "and some of the 52 Weeks's, this being the commonest name in Priddy."***



***All pictures from A Man Deep In Mendip, the Caving Diaries of Harry Savory 1910-1921. Alan Sutton Publishing, Gloucester, 1989***

#### **Note**

After the above article had been written, we received the sad news of the passing of Chris Richards . See page 3.