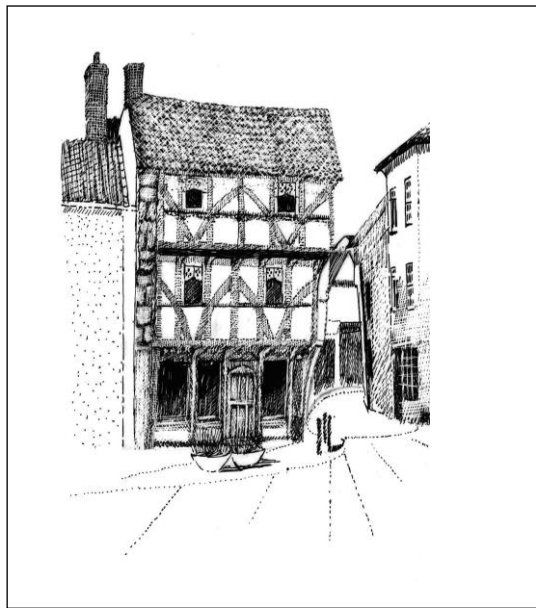


Retrospect

Issue No 15, July 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 urgently wanted 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

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YOUR DIARY DATES

July 17: Sandford Station Heritage Centre, 2.30pm, guided tour with Lois Brenchley as a follow-up to our highly-successful talk on the Strawberry Line. If you are planning to be there, please let Liz Scott know by email moorlandfm@btinternet.com or telephone 01934 733341 by **July 12th** to help with catering.

August: No meeting – but look out for the month's edition of *Retrospect*.

September 18: The Churches of Weston-super-Mare, with John Crockford Hawley. Cross Memorial Hall, 7.30 pm; non-members £5, refreshments £2

King John's Hunting Lodge Museum

July: the museum's collection of clocks made in Axbridge



BEWARE THE BLUE-EYED DRAGON!



A fierce-looking blue-eyed and red-tongued monster almost dominated a visit by two dozen Friends in glorious welcoming sunshine to St Mary the Virgin Church in Christon. The dragon-head is one of four in the chamber of the bell-tower, and churchwarden Mary Counsel

explained that experts believe it could date from Viking times, although how it got to its present elevated position is a mystery. Its three equally-threatening companion dragon-heads are excellent but rather later copies, probably from medieval times.





Mary – a devoted and life-long Christian – gave a fascinating history of the village, from its well-preserved early Iron Age, Roman and medieval strip fields in the deserted village on Flagstaff Hill, to the development through the centuries of homes and farms. She discussed the discovery in 1970 of a fascinating archaeological site



during the building of the M5, when a number of Iron Age burials were excavated. But the details on which she was most closely involved were in the church itself. Built in around 1170 but incorporating traces of Anglo-Saxon herring-bone stonework from more than 100 years before. The Victorians carried out many modifications, including new windows in the nave, and white-washed the interior walls, on which recent investigations have revealed some beautiful medieval wall painting still survive. Mary also spoke of the church's stunning stained glass windows, including one of medieval Somerset glass and another very moving one installed just after the Second World War in memory of Michael Garton Durrant, a relation of the local Wainwright family who was a sergeant in the RAF but was killed in a Bomber Command raid on the port and canal of Kiel. He

is shown in full kit with a map of the German port and with his mother, who served as a VAD in London.

Finally, before serving tea and cake to everyone, Mary told the story of the 12th century font, now in its rightful place in the nave after being rescued from a field where it was used as a cattle water-trough!



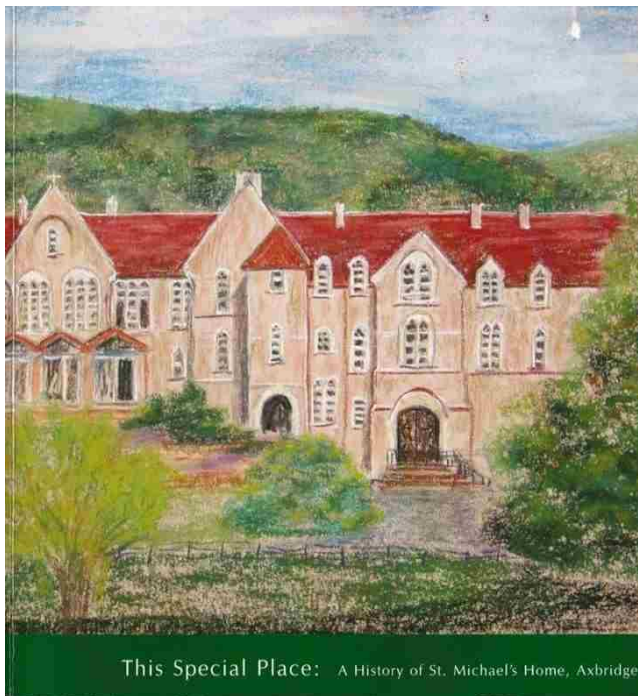
Mary Counsel, at the microphone, talks to Friends in St Mary the Virgin Church, Christon, and John Page gets a close-up of some of the medieval wall painting.



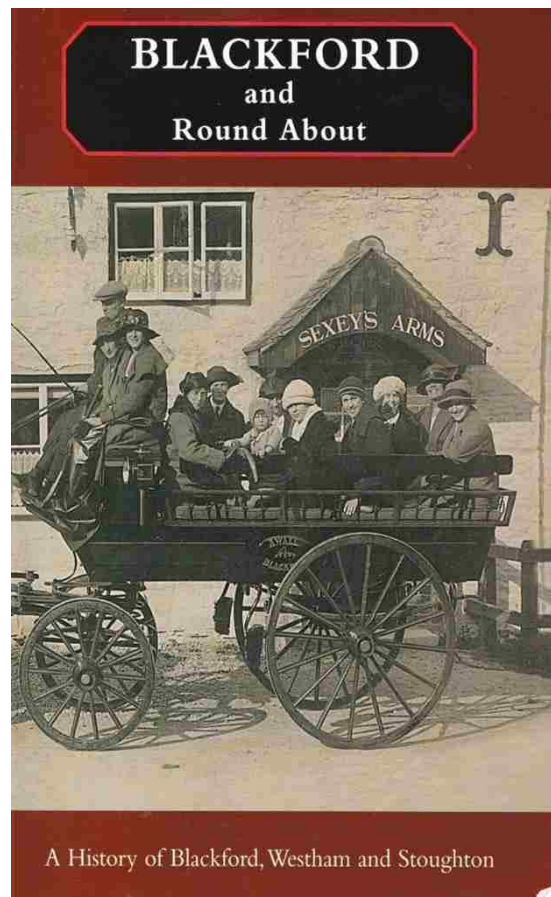
FROM LOCAL HISTORY TO RIPPING YARNS – ONE MAN’S SEARCH FOR BOOK BARGAINS

Leslie is a book enthusiast whose hobby is regularly to visit local charity and book shops in search of bargains: not precious and rare volumes which others have overlooked, but an extraordinarily wide range – from blockbusting best-sellers to long-forgotten local history works which can be picked up for perhaps 50p or £1. Leslie, an enthusiastic member of the Friends of St John’s Hunting Lodge Museum, prefers not to reveal his full name as he describes his passion:

As a voracious reader, usually getting through at least one book a week, I need a constant supply of reading matter. Unfortunately I don’t find the County Library very satisfactory – unless on the odd occasion I want to order a special book – as all the similarly-coloured spines on the shelves seem to blend into one blurred mass so that no individual book stands out to demand my attention.



Two of the local gems picked up as bargains in charity shops: the 2004 history of St Michael's Cheshire Home, Axbridge, and the Blackford



History Group's volume published in the same year

Dedicated second-hand book shops are few and far between these days, although the Oxfam book shop in Wells and the charity book shop in Copse Road, Clevedon, both have an interesting range. They've provided me with such items as Arthur Mee's *Somerset*, one of the *King's England* series from



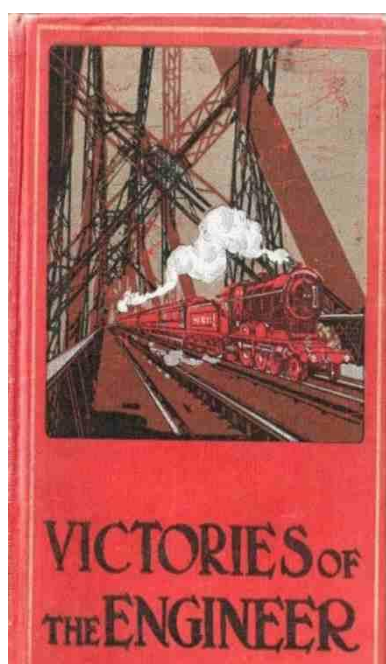
1948, and *A Traditional Village Affair 1853-2003*, a record of the Nailsea and District Horticultural Society and its flower shows.

The quarterly book sales at Winscombe Community Centre has had some surprises, such as a little book *Walks Round Winscombe*, by Christine Crossland and dated 1992, or the *Winscombe and District Guide*, from the late 1950s (ABOVE LEFT). This gives a flavour of old times, with advertisements with three-digit telephone numbers such as Axbridge 400 and Churchill 223.

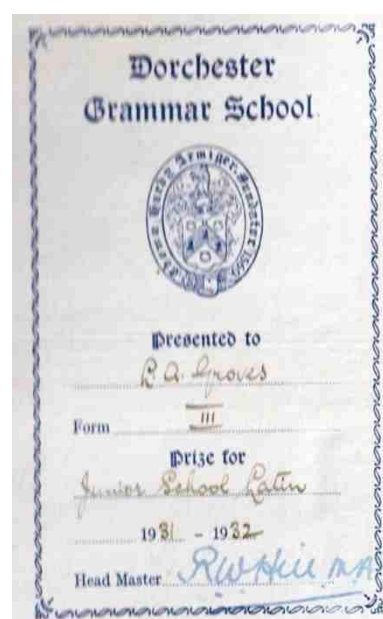
The Book Barn at Hallatrow is much missed; that's where all the books were £1 and where I found a copy of *A Mendip Valley*, published in 1892 about the residents and surroundings of

Winscombe, and W.G. Hoskins's classic, *The Making of the English Landscape*.

However, now it's generally the book section of charity shops that satisfy my latent hunter-gatherer instincts! Most towns have at least a couple of these with a good selection of fiction, and where hardback copies are so much nicer to handle than paperbacks. I find the works and ripping yarns of popular authors such as Bernard Cornwell, Michael Connelly, Jeffrey Archer and Robert Galbraith on sale at reasonable prices, while occasionally I find one by a popular long-dead writer I missed reading at the time, or even books I did read long ago which can bring back happy memories.

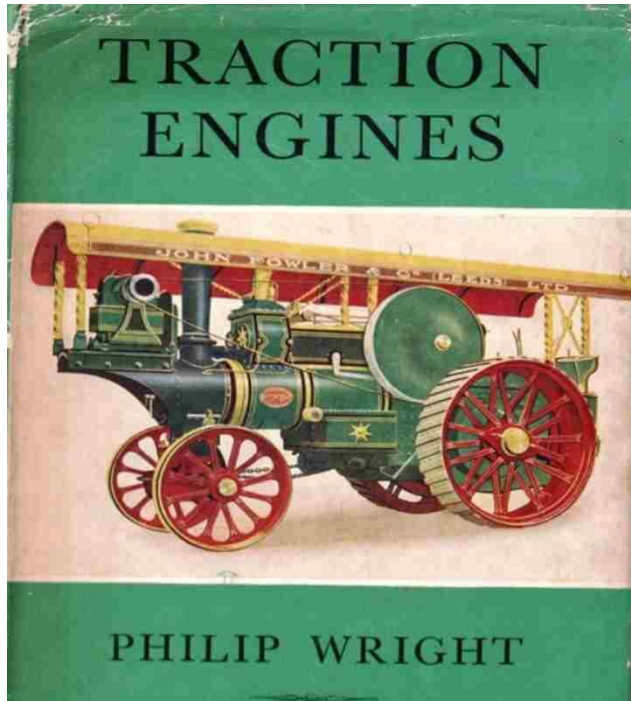


Added interest can come from inscriptions inside the covers. For instance, *Victories of the Engineer* has a label embossed with the Dorchester Grammar School crest and presented as a prize for Latin to a pupil in Form 3 in 1932. Or there's one volume with the signed personal dedication to a friend by Woodrow Watt in a copy of his autobiography. But the real thrill comes from finds in the non-fiction



section. Autobiographies can range from John Buchan's *Memory Hold the Door* to Sir Max Hasting's *Editor* or obscure offerings such as *Secrets of the National Archives*, or *Innovations and Discovery – Bath and the Rise of Science*.

Then there was another find – *The Archimedes Codex*, describing the finding of the oldest surviving manuscript of Archimedes hidden within the later writing of a medieval prayer book where the original vellum had been cleaned and re-used. I'm always looking out for the wonderfully obscure!



Finally I make for the section headed "Local Interest." I found *Sweet Track to Glastonbury*, which is still an enjoyable read 35 years on; or local history group publications such as *Blackford and Roundabout*, and *Every House Tells a Story* with its companion volume, *More Stories From Langford*, chronicling the history of some of that village's older houses and their residents. *Traction Engines*, which I picked up because I found it was previously owned by the late Reuben Smith, a near-neighbour who was a renowned model-maker and traction engine enthusiast.

Most of the books I purchase and read go back to the charity shops so they can be sold again. But some, especially ones of local interest, I keep for my library and maybe lend to friends and neighbours. So for a very modest outlay I get the satisfaction of finding a little gem, followed by the pleasure of reading it and letting others enjoy it, too.



Ian Tabrett writes: The Winscombe guide has a wonderful old photo ABOVE of Max Mill and its pond beside Max Mill Lane, between Barton Road and Winthill. It also lists long-gone landmarks such as the Mooseheart holiday home of the Loyal Order of Moose; Bird's Restaurant and Assembly Rooms; branches of Westminster, Lloyds and Midlands banks; a police station; the Woodborough Temperance Hall; and –

hard to believe in 2024 – two deliveries of mail a day, from 6.30am and 2pm, and collections at 5.10am, 6.20am, 2pm, and 5.35pm.

Having been a neighbourly and long-time beneficiary of his passion for books, I can vouch for the wide-ranging benefits of his expeditions. He keeps me well supplied with anything from Bernard Cornwell's ripping yarns of the Napoleonic-era soldier Richard Sharpe, to the very many gems from nearer home..