

Retrospect

Issue No 16, August 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 and contributions to editor Ian Tabrett at tabrett.cross@btinternet.com These are vital to continue making *Retrospect* an interesting and informative read, and are urgently needed!

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In this edition:

*It's over and out as Axbridge Workhouse is closed almost 100 years ago.

*We take a trip down memory lane – or should that be the memory line?

*And, of course, all the dates of Friends' events for the rest of this year plus an appeal for the start of next year, and others that you may like to know about.

YOUR DIARY DATES

August: No meeting.

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

October 23: share with stewards of Axbridge and District Museum Trust a visit to the National Trust property of Dyrham Park. Entry free to members plus cream tea but perhaps bring a picnic lunch, although refreshments are available on site. A minibus will pick up at Cross at 9.30am and Axbridge Square 10am. *Please confirm with Liz Scott if you will be attending .Non members welcome but a fee will be required*

November 20: **Somerset Fingerposts, Signposts, Milestones and Tollhouses.** Talk by Richard Raynesford, of the Milestone Society, with introduction by Janet Dowding, author of *The Toll Houses of Somerset*. **Cross Memorial Hall, 2.30pm; non-members £5, refreshments £2**

December: Christmas meal and quiz – date and more details later.

An early appeal: on **Wednesday January 15** we will be holding a members' afternoon at Cross Memorial Hall, for which we need volunteers to speak for up to 10 minutes on any local-interest topic of your choice. We already have a couple of names but need more. Please contact Liz Scott – by email at moorlandfm@btinternet.com or telephone on [01934 733341](tel:01934733341) – with your offers and ideas

...AND MORE DATES TO NOTE

The Banwell Society of Archaeology and Local History have sent details of their forthcoming monthly meetings, to which visitors are most welcome. Venue: Banwell Village Hall, BS29 6BS, where there is easy parking. The Chair is David Elsey and secretary, Maggie McCarthy. Meetings start at 7.30pm prompt; visitors £3, refreshments available.

Wednesday 7 August, 2pm: Visit to King John's Hunting Lodge Museum, Axbridge, guided by John Page, followed by cream tea at the Almhouse Tea rooms.

Friday 13 September, 7.30pm: My life as a wheelwright and carriage restorer: Mike Horler

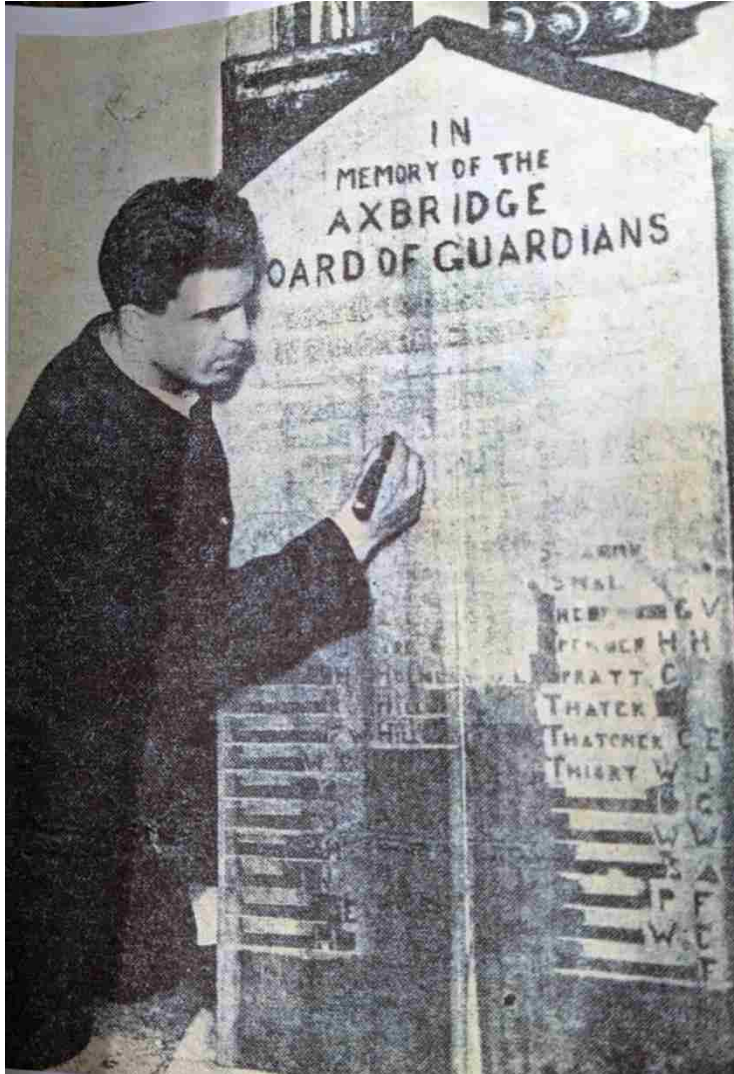
Friday 11 October 7.30pm: The world of ghosts:by Brian Wright.

Friday 8 November 7.30pm: Steep Holm's maritime history 1300-1850: by Philip Ashford

Friday 13 December 7.30pm: Bleadon – ancient village: by John Crockford-Hawley

A TASK EASIER SAID THAN DONE!

A fading photocopy of a 94-year-old newspaper cutting, part of a display in the King John's Hunting Lodge Museum, triggered a bright idea from John Page: as a follow-



up to Margaret Jordan's article in *Retrospect* No. 8 last December about Axbridge Workhouse: why not write a piece about the inmate who used just a nail, a knife and a file to produce a board commemorating the closure of the imposing but somewhat forbidding establishment?

In fact, the task proved a great deal easier said than done, despite the museum's extensive collection and impressive displays about the workhouse. But while it contains some fascinating details about life and death there, nothing is known about the obviously skilled man (LEFT) who created that board, other than his name, Mr C. Harvey, given by the *Weston Mercury* in April 1930. Who suggested it in the first place, and who told him how to word it? Across the top is the

statement: "THE POOR YE HAVE ALWAYS." Then follows – all in immaculate capital letters: "IN MEMORY OF THE AXRIDGE BOARD OF GUARDIANS WHO CEASED TO BE ON MARCH 31 A.D 1930.

"EVER REMEMBERED BY THE POOR."

The rest of the space is taken up by the names of the Clerk and all the worthies who made up the Board of Guardians and oversaw the closure of the workhouse after almost a century of providing shelter and care for around 250 unmarried mothers and their children, the frail, the elderly, and tramps and vagrants from the district.



But who was “Mr C. Harvey”? He certainly looks to be robust, probably in his 20s with a full head of neatly cut hair, and wearing a uniform or working overalls. Times then were hard but even so, was he actually an “inmate” or perhaps a member of the maintenance staff at the workhouse, where the photograph was apparently taken? What happened to him once the “Closed” sign went up on the main entrance?

The museum displays, thanks to the immaculate researches and efforts of John Page, contain a vast amount of information about the workhouse and

the regime, but very little about the guardians and staff, and even less about the individuals who sheltered there.

There are details of the fare provided for them by the kitchen team; a mouse trap with holes to attract six at a time; sheets of detailed instructions for all the staff; even a brass instrument from the Workhouse Union’s band (ABOVE).

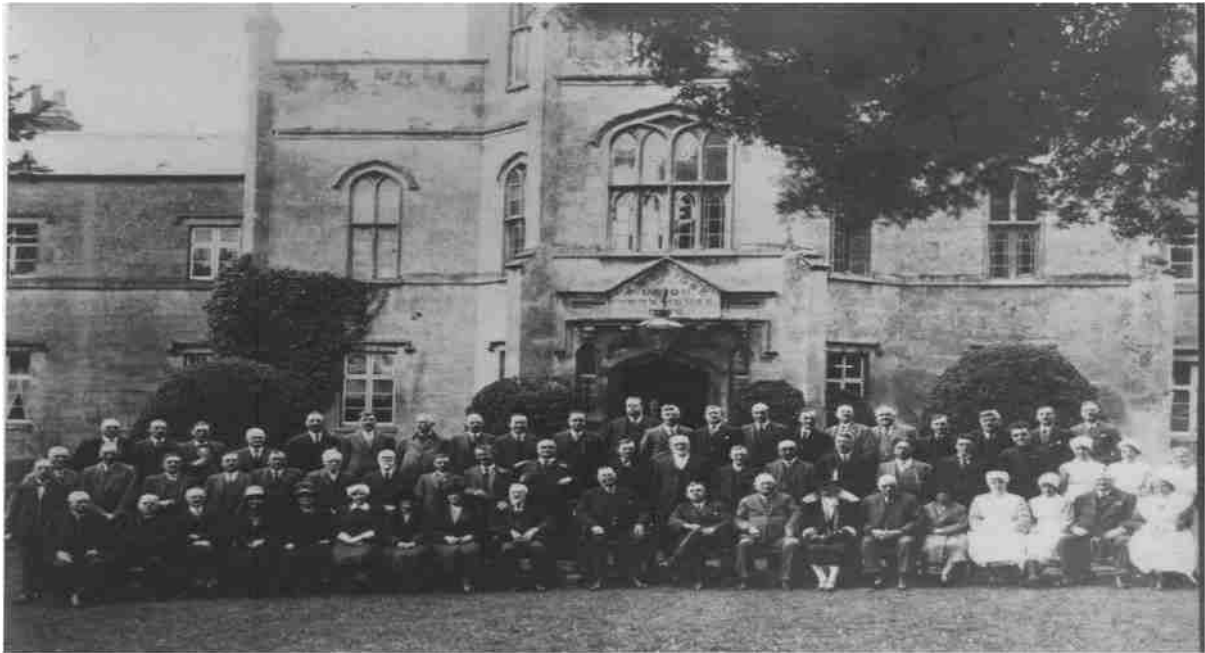


But undoubtedly most sobering and poignant of all is a simple coffin on the bier that would have been used to carry it and the deceased to the grave. Certainly for everyone able to clamber two flights of narrow stairs, the workhouse display is well worth the effort to see a way of life fortunately long gone.

Ian Tabrett



The imposing main entrance of Axbridge Workhouse in 1900



It's 1929, and a group photograph is taken to show all the staff and Board of Governors at the workhouse when it was about to be closed

**TRAIN OF THOUGHT AT SANDFORD AND BANWELL
STATION – FROM THIS SCENE IN 1963...**



(Ian Tabrett collection)

...TO THIS IN 2024



...AND LOOK WHAT HAPPENED ON THE WAY!





(Ian Tabrett collection)



Almost two dozen Friends and visitors took a journey back in time during a visit to the restored Sandford and Banwell railway station, as a follow-up to the recent talk given by Lois Brenchley. Again, Lois gave fascinating facts and figures about the Cheddar Valley line which ran through the station until its closure in 1963, the long and sometimes fraught campaign to open the route as a public walkway – in which she and John Page took a leading part – and all the work which has gone into returning the historic building, dating from the 1860s, to its former glory.

Thanks to a huge amount of research and effort over 40 years, the Heritage Centre's volunteers have amassed a vast collection of historic items – from original furniture, signalling equipment, documents and photographs to a unique carriage – the very first of its design built by British Rail – goods wagons and even a steam locomotive identical to one which was used to bring loads of stone down a spur line from the nearby Sandford quarry to the station's sidings.

ABOVE, Lois Brenchley and Liz Scott are almost persuaded to buy a ticket at the



original ticket window between the waiting room and ticket office; while **LEFT,** two Friends enjoy the Centre's working steam train on the model of the station, which is operated on the platform outside the full-size original!

The Heritage Centre will be open from 11am to 4pm at weekends and Bank Holidays until October

27. It offers hot and cold drinks, ices and home-made cakes, which the Friends were able to enjoy during their two-hour visit. It relies on donations and subscriptions, and Lois appealed for people to volunteer to help the team.

WE HAVE AN EXCELLENT PROGRAMME LINED UP FOR 2025, BUT PLEASE NOTE THAT FROM NOW ON, ALL AFTERNOON MEETINGS WILL START AT 2.30pm PROMPT, AND THOSE IN THE EVENING, AT 7.30pm

You can keep up to date with developments at King John's Hunting Lodge Museum through the website <https://kingjohnshuntinglodge.co.uk>. The museum is open until October 31, Tuesdays to Sundays 1pm to 4pm. On the website click on "Newsletters" for further information and Retrospect back numbers