

Retrospect

Issue No 24, March 2025

Newsletter of the Friends of
King John's Hunting Lodge

News, views and events



Friends and members of the former Axbridge Archaeological and Local History Society, we always want to hear your views, comments, and suggestions for the future, and we need articles for *Retrospect*. So 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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DIARY DATES

19 March: CMH 2.30pm: Ashton (**below**) and Stone Allerton Windmills – Fiona Torrens-Spence



20 March: Current excavations on Mendip – Dr Jodie Lewis. This is the annual Barry Lane memorial lecture to which we are invited at Westbury-sub-Mendip. A mini bus will pick up in Cross and Axbridge those who have booked seats.

16 April: CMH 2.30 - The delights of Edwardian Gardens – Yvonne Bell. **See picture below**



COFFEE BREAK



Stewards and Friends of King John's Hunting Lodge Museum enjoy a convivial January coffee morning at the Lamb Inn, Axbridge.

DID YOU KNOW THAT...

- **Friends** will receive a reminder to renew subscriptions just before the anniversary of first joining. The cost is £15 single or £25 couple/family. As well as receiving *Retrospect* monthly, benefits include free attendance at our meetings or outings; invitations to events organised by the Axbridge and District Museum Trust; free unlimited access to the museum during opening times; access to the museum's artefacts and library at times arranged with curator Lucy Newman.
- **The museum** re-opens for the season on Friday 28 March, with the official ceremony during the monthly Farmers' Market on Saturday 5 April. Thanks to an increase in the number of volunteers to meet and greet visitors, the museum will open every Tuesday – and if a few more volunteers are recruited it could be open every day through the season.
- **The 15th century building's** ground floor has been revamped to include a children's area containing new costumes to allow young visitors to try clothes of the past. There is also a new permanent exhibition on the tragic Basle air disaster, which affected so many in Axbridge and surrounding villages.
- **You** can learn much more about the museum, its history and its large collections – and catch up on past issues of *Retrospect* – by visiting the website on <https://kingjohnshuntinglodge.co.uk>

ALL ABOARD FOR AN EPIC TALE



Long-time ss Great Britain volunteer Ian Caskie gave an enthralling talk at the Friends' February meeting on the building and history of the groundbreaking Victorian vessel.

Ian was born and raised on Merseyside, and had a lifelong passion for ships – especially ocean liners. He became a visitor experience volunteer and tour guide with the ss Great Britain Trust in 2007, and gives talks all over England. He described how in building the ship, Isambard Kingdom Brunel combined and

adapted the best of cutting-edge technologies of the time to create the world's first luxury transatlantic liner. Launched in 1843, she was the first ocean-going steamship

with an iron hull, and the first driven by a propeller. Ian's illustrated talk told the ship's remarkable story, life on board – even with cattle, pigs, sheep and 1,000 hens, turkeys and ducks to provide fresh provisions – through the many phases of her working life, her abandonment in the Falklands then her incredible salvage and return to Bristol in 1970. Since then a huge amount of restoration work has made her a multi-award winning museum of international renown. Today, visitors and entertained with regular costume dramas



telling 19th century passengers' tales and experiences on their long voyages across the world, as well as guided tours and special exhibitions to complement the nearby Brunel Museum. It is hoped to arrange a group visit for Friends, probably in 2026..



FOCUS ON A TOURIST ATTRACTION...95 YEARS LATE

The closure and draining of Weston-super-Mare's Marine Lake for repairs and improvements this year has thrown the spotlight on a collection of long-forgotten photographs owned by a Cheddar Valley resident, writes



Ian Tabrett. They and other archive material were rescued by Mrs Jenny Hay, from Compton Bishop, which had belonged to her grandfather, Harold A. Brown, **pictured left.** He was Weston Urban District Council and later Borough Council surveyor and water engineer, who oversaw the building of the lake.

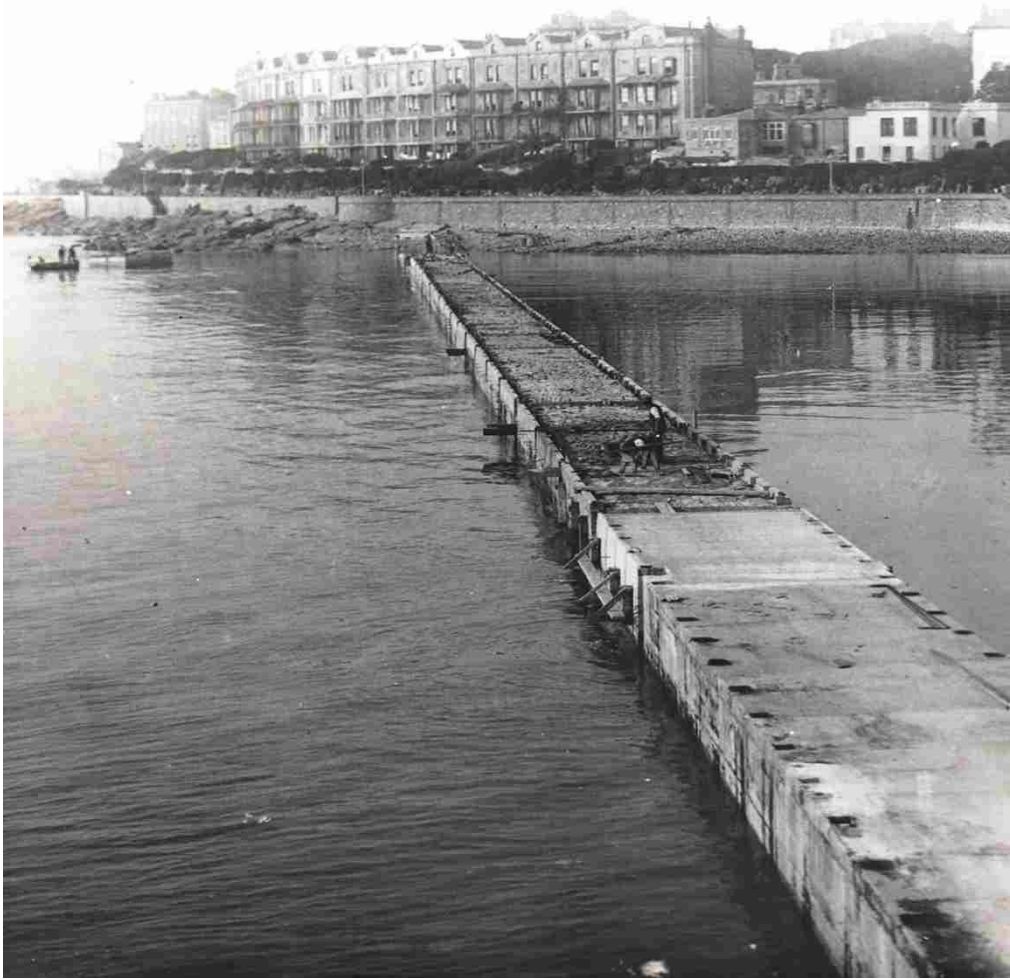
That was in 1929, and the aim was to provide Weston's flourishing holiday trade with a safe place for boating and bathing even when the tide was out. Harold was obviously keen to keep a pictorial record as the work progressed, and ordered a set of photographs taken by staff of the *Weston-super-Mare Gazette*. An envelope in which they arrived at his office shows the charges: large prints, 2s (10p) or 1s 6d (7.5p) if ordered by the dozen; or half-size, 1s (5p) each, 9d (4.5p) by the dozen.



Work begins to connect Knightstone Island to the site of the new causeway



Floating a causeway caisson into position. The photographer penned a note saying this is an enlargement from a wider picture



Nearly there...



The new lake was an immediate success, with more than a quarter-of-a-million people visiting in the first year. The causeway enclosing Glentworth Bay allowed people to walk from Knightstone Island to the opposite Claremont headland. The lake was equipped with a diving stage, rafts, rubber boats, water chutes, children's paddle boats, bathing tents and dressing enclosures, and a colonnaded walkway and the Rozel bandstand were added in the 1930s.



A 1935 postcard from the Geof Sheppard Collection showing the Marine Lake packed with people, and trams and a double decker bus on the road above

Harold Brown took up his post in Weston in 1908 or 1909, having moved from London, and he remained in his important position for decades. Apart from the Marine Lake, another of his major tasks was to oversee some 10 years or more of negotiations and legal battles to cover the ancient pond in the centre of Banwell and pipe the spring water to supply Weston's growing population. We will take a look at this important project in a future edition of *Retrospect*.

AND FINALLY...

John Page and the Museum team are organising a special exhibition in September and October to mark the 80th anniversaries of VE-Day and VJ-Day, and are appealing for contributions from local people of their memories, photographs and other material. *Retrospect* will also join the anniversary commemoration with special features in the May and June editions, and would welcome your reminiscences of events during the Second World War and marking its end in 1945