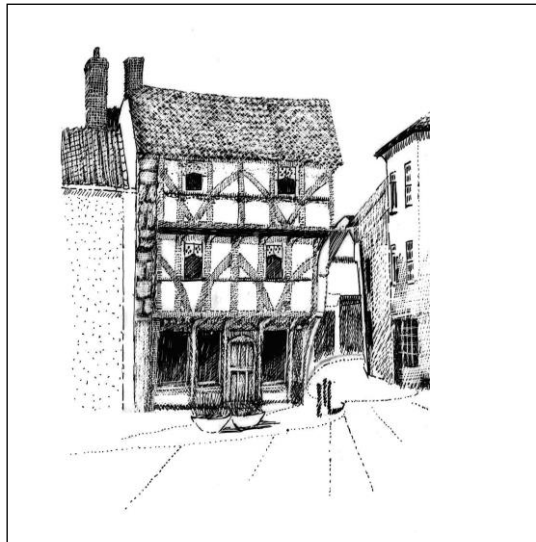


Retrospect

Issue No 12, April 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 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

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

April 17: *The Matthew*, the replica of Cabot's ship. Talk by Clive Burlton
Cross Memorial Hall, 7pm; non-members £5, refreshments £2

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

...AND EVENTS AT KING JOHN'S HUNTING LODGE MUSEUM

Saturday 6 April 10am: official opening for the season to coincide with Axbridge Farmer's Market.

April, May: Allerton Historical Society exhibition of archive photographs.

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

HOW TIME FLIES!



From this...

...to this, and into space!

More than 40 Friends, Museum trustees and members of the Axbridge Active Living group attended the talk at Axbridge Town Hall by John Page on the theme of "Time" when he traced how mankind has kept track of the seasons, days and hours from Stonehenge to the Space Age. But his particular emphasis was on the incredible number of clockmakers based in Axbridge over the centuries – no fewer than 31 of them – and the rare examples of their work such as those in the Museum (above right) and Town Hall.



John said that thanks to a number of grants, the Museum had recently been able to buy their collection of longcase clocks which had been on loan for many years from Phil Wookey. He went on to describe how, apart from Man's early use of the sun to track the seasons, later devices used sand and water, while sundials like an elaborate one on Axbridge Church, ensured that Mass was said at specific times.

By the late 13th century, mechanical clocks were developed like the famous one at Wells Cathedral, one of the earliest in Britain. By the mid-15th century Axbridge documents record that one Harry Dennis was paid as timekeeper to ring a bell to denote the start and finish of the nightly curfew. John's research showed he was noted as "keeping the clock," meaning the church must have had a fairly early timepiece.

Later entries recorded that “the blind man” named Richard was paid 20d on Lady Day to maintain the clock for the coming year. By the 18th century records show that Somerset had around 150 clockmakers, and Axbridge was one of the major centres.



Some of the town’s clockmakers were reasonably well documented, while very little was known about many others, said John. The Brock family were clockmakers in Axbridge during the first half of the 18th century, and it was noted that James Brock “lately made and sett up a Clock and Chymes in the Tower of...the parish Church of Axbridge...for which he was paid a considerable sum of money” and he agreed to repair and maintain the clock for 5s (25p) a year for his lifetime. The family also serviced clocks in villages



over quite a large area. Among the other names found in the records are John Bilbie of the famous bell-founding family of Chew Stoke – his clocks are very rare as he died at the age of 32, but one of his was the first to be acquired by the Museum, with the most recent being those of Thomas Williams; George Williams; William Maggs.

Thomas Williams, said John, “appears to have been a bit of a lad!” In 1829 at the age of 23 and living in West Street, he was accused of fathering a bastard child, while in the same year he was summonsed for assault against Sarah Williams; he eventually married an Axbridge girl when he was 50.

It was Thomas who made the clocks which linked outside and inside at the Town Hall, which also has a fine long case clock, made by Charles Maggs. He is noted as a watchmaker living in Axbridge in 1830, having married a Miss Burrow of Badgworth

the year before. However, he died in 1835, aged just 36. Then there was Henry Schneider, an immigrant from Germany, whose workshop towards the end of the 19th century was in King John’s Hunting Lodge from at least 1883 until 1894.

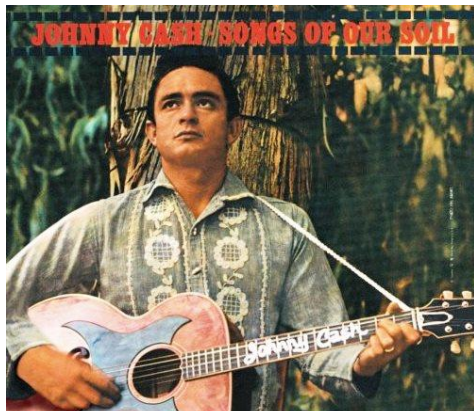
John told the audience that in fact Henry’s name appeared with various spellings – Sneiler and Snialer – in documents from as early as 1859. He, his wife Emma and

their young daughter and son originally lived in High Street, but by 1871 and with four more children – they had at least nine altogether – they were recorded as living in a small and overcrowded cottage near the town’s new police station. He was described as “industrious but of small means” and was under notice to vacate the premises due to overcrowding. In 1883 he was back living in part of a house in High Street, but by 1891 he was a widower. In that year a mason’s labourer who was in fact his brother-in-law was noted as being fined 10s (50p) for violently assaulting and beating him by kicking him in the legs.

John’s wide-ranging talk also encompassed the clock outside the Bristol Exchange dating from 1822 and which was later provided with two minute hands 10 minutes apart to show both local time and the new railway time set by Greenwich. Liz told everyone that having been born in the city, the clock was probably the reason why she was known as “the late Mrs Scott” because she looked at the wrong hand!



Meanwhile, the famous “BBC pips” consisting of a series of six short tones broadcast to mark the



precise start of each hour celebrated their 100th anniversary on February 5. And finally, an unexpected musical interlude as John told why long case clocks are known as grandfather clocks: a song written in 1876 based on a legend in Scotland that such a clock always mysteriously stopped when its owners died, so he played a hit parade version by Johnny Cash to entertained his listeners...

IAN TABRETT

Axbridge’s police chief who fought crime for Queen and country

Margaret Jordan traces the remarkable career of one of the Somerset Constabulary’s first officers.

Henry Gillbanks was born in Holme, Westmoreland, in February 1827, the son of Henry Gillbanks, a master tailor who was born 1792, and his wife Margaret, née Hadwin. Henry Junior was apprenticed as a tailor but in 1857 when he was 20, he is believed to have come to Somerset to join the county’s newly-formed Constabulary. Shortly afterwards, he married Ann Puddy, from Wedmore, while staying in Bedminster, and they went to live in the Police House on New Wells Road in Shepton Mallett, where their first child, Margaret, was born two years later..



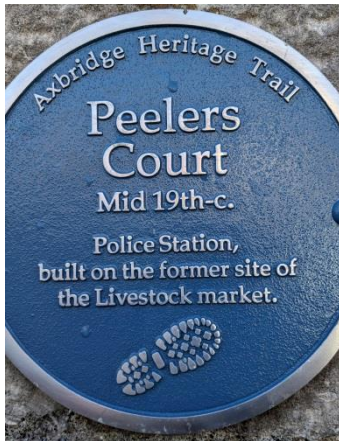
The Somerset Constabulary was formed as a result of the County and Borough Police Act of 1856, which made it compulsory for all authorities to form a county police force. The first Somerset chief constable was Valentine Goold, a former officer of the Irish Constabulary who went on in the post from 1856 to 1884. From the outset he determined that his new force would have strict discipline, and this was to remain the case through his tenure of office, and indeed through most of that of his successor.

A committee was set up to decide the number of constables who would be needed, and their rate of pay. Constables would receive 16s (today, 85p) per week; sergeants £1 1s (£1.10), while a superintendent's salary was £120 a year, plus expenses of £40. Henry Gillbanks (pictured above in later life, looking quite formidable) was one of the first recruits to the new force, which soon found it difficult to retain good officers, which undoubtedly resulted in his promotion to the rank of sergeant after just three months. Their uniform in the 1870s and '80s would have been as seen here..

Officer Gillbanks clearly looked quite imposing because at 5 feet 11 inches tall he was above average height for a man at that time. In the only known photograph of him, taken in later life, his bulky appearance in his braided uniform certainly gives the impression of a no-nonsense officer of the law!

Cases of civil disorder and riots, mostly against the price of food in the 1860s and 70s plus many unruly political rallies during Parliamentary elections, gave the new force a severe testing. However it received great credit for the manner in which its officers performed their duties.





A new police station (above) was built in Moorland Street, Axbridge, on the site of the old livestock market, and Henry Gillbanks and his wife moved in with their growing family. Their presence is recorded by the baptisms of their 12 children between 1861 and 1878 and from the 1871 Census we can draw a picture of the police house bursting at the seams as Margaret Gillbanks coped with their then eight children, from a baby aged just four months up to 11. Henry's son, John Henry, born in 1867, also became a policeman, serving first at Glastonbury and later, Frome. He was awarded the King's Medal for Gallantry in 1918.

Another record in the 1871 Census is the fact that the by-now Sergeant Gillbanks had two constables also living in Axbridge: PC Henry Greenslade and PC Edward Short. Pictured right is the style of uniform they would have worn when on duty in the 1870s and 80s.



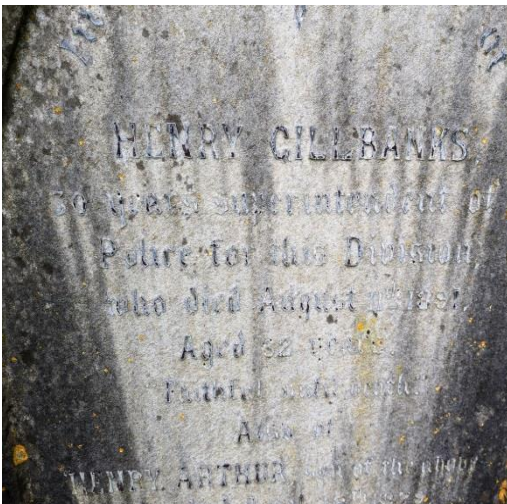
Clearly Henry was highly-respected, and he was promoted to Superintendent First Class in 1886. He is also remembered in English case law: four years earlier, he had decided to stop a march by the Salvation Army due to take place in Weston-super-Mare. It is hard to believe now, but Salvation Army marches had caused disorderly behaviour in the town involving mobs who were against the Salvationists' attitude to alcohol.

More than 100 assembled despite the banning order and began their procession through the town. Their leader was arrested and was later convicted of a breach of the peace. The Salvation Army appealed against the verdict and it was agreed that they had performed no act of violence and were only exercising their legal right to progress to their place of worship.



This decision, while showing that Gillbanks made a mistake by banning the march, set a precedent and moved forward English civil rights. Clearly, though, his error had no detrimental effect on his promotion four years later. Altogether, he served 35 years in the Somerset Constabulary and died while still in service aged 62 in August 1891.. Henry is buried in Axbridge churchyard on the north side of the church (picture left). The headstone's faded inscription shows his wife Ann – who was 10 years his junior and who died in July 1914 when she was 77 – was buried with him while the grave is also the final resting place of their son Henry Arthur, who had died in 1879 aged just seven months.

Church records show a number of other members of the Gillbanks family were buried in the churchyard, the last in 1955. Pictured below right is an historic badge from his time that is on display in the King John's Hunting Lodge Museum, Axbridge.



Information on the history of the Somerset Constabulary was given to me by Paul Beaverstock from research he did for U3A. Thanks are also due to Pam Line, great great-granddaughter of Henry, for delving into the family records.

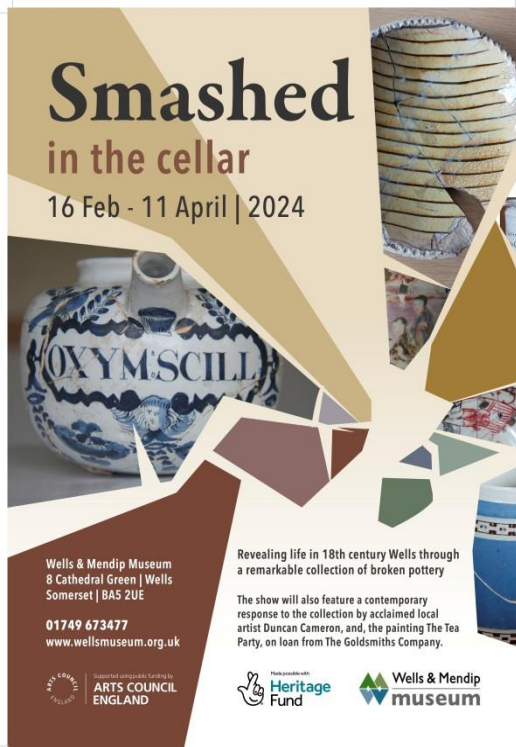


WHAT A SMASHING COLLECTION!



The discovery of a mountain of crockery, glassware, bottles and other domestic items, some dating back more than 350 years, in an abandoned cellar at the rear of Wells Museum was remarkable enough. But the work that has gone into the intricate

restoration and research on the hundreds of items, their origins and their owners, is even more so. The collection of almost 1,000 items – some more or less complete



but most badly chipped or in fragments – is the subject of an exhibition at the museum until April 11, and Dr Oliver Kent, who played a leading part in the project, was the speaker at our well-attended March meeting.

He traced the history of the complex of buildings on their imposing site looking out on to Wells Cathedral, from relatively modest beginnings in medieval times to their transformation and development into today's museum. The hoard was revealed during preparations for an extension at the rear when the cellar, numerous wall foundations and a cobbled courtyard were uncovered.

The range of dates for the finds is thought to be from around 1680 to 1820 – the year the family home appears to have been cleared of its entire contents when it was being modernised and reshaped to suit early 19th

century needs. Dr Kent said it appeared that the orders to the builders at that time were: "Just get rid of everything!"



And so they did: whole dinner and tea sets – some "incredibly rare" – wine bottles, drinking glasses, china ornaments, a range of medical pottery and glass, and even a number of tooth and hair brushes for both grown-ups and children were thrown unceremoniously into that cellar. The ceramics, from very fine and intricate for special occasions to quite coarse for every day use, were made in both China and



England. Some may even have been imported from China together with tea by a group of merchants in Taunton sailing their own three-masted ship *Taunton Castle* under the auspices of the East India Company, which was founded in 1600. As Dr Kent said: "Every piece was bought for use and lived its life in the house before it became a museum. We can't meet the people who lived there but these objects were theirs and speak for them."

*All pictures, Dr Oliver Kent;
words Ian Tabrett*

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