

Retrospect

Issue No 21, December 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 always want to hear your views, comments, and suggestions for the future, so keep them coming in – send your ideas to Liz by email at moorlandfm@btinternet.com and contributions to editor Ian Tabrett at tabrett.cross@btinternet.com

IN THIS EDITION: Invitations to coffee and our Christmas dinner; diary dates; exhibition plans at the museum, and meet the Curator; how the Edwardians celebrated Christmas; and new life for a very old mile post.

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DIARY DATES

Saturday 7 December: The Axbridge and District Museum Trust invite Friends to a coffee morning at the Lamb Inn, Axbridge, at 11.30am. Names to Liz by December 3 please, so that numbers are known.

December 13: Christmas meal and quiz, Lamb Inn, Weare, 7pm. Menu choices to Liz by December 3.

15 January: CMH 2.30pm, refreshments free! Short presentations by Friends on a variety of topics: Madeleine Roberts, Phil Thorne, Lester Durston, Fiona Torrens-Spence, and John Page.

19 February: CMH 2.30pm The SS Great Britain - Brian Aston

19 March: CMH 2.30pm Ashton and Stone Allerton Windmills - Fiona Torrens-Spence

20 March: Current excavations on Mendip – Prof Jodie Lewis

This is the annual Barry Lane lecture to which we are invited at Westbury-sub-Mendip. A mini bus will pick up in Cross and Axbridge, with details to follow.

The venue for all these is Cross Memorial Hall (CMH), free to paid-up members of Friends of King John's Hunting Lodge; visitors and non-members £5; refreshments £2 for tea/coffee and cake.

THE STORY OF THE MUSEUM'S COLLECTIONS

King John's Hunting Lodge Museum has a remarkable and important collection of items of local, regional and in some cases national significance. The origin of the collection can be traced to the founding in 1950 of the Axbridge Caving Group.

To mark the 75th anniversary of the collection, the Collections and Exhibitions Committee of the Axbridge and District Museum Trust is planning an exhibition in the Hunting Lodge in April and May next year.

The committee will be led by John Page, former chair of the Trust, assisted by David Roberts, former chair of Axbridge Archaeological and Local History Society.

John and David would welcome volunteers to join them in the planning, research and presentation of relevant material. If you would like to become involved, please contact John at myrtle.bk@gmail.com or David at roberts.dandm@gmail.com.

We look forward to hearing from you.

MEET THE MUSEUM CURATOR



Lucy Newman joined the Axbridge and District Museum Trust in 2005. She is the Museum's Curator with responsibility for the care of the collections both in storage and on display. She is also responsible for the upkeep of the Museum catalogue, and for the accreditation of the Museum.

She has a degree in history and an MA in museum studies from University College, London. In her spare time she enjoys sewing, country walks, visiting heritage sites and baking.

POINTING THE WAY

Right: in 2007, this was resident of Cross and Museum Friend Roger Veale pointing out the need to restore the historic but damaged Cross mile post, which was moved to the parish boundary on the A38 when the new road was built in 1930.

And **below**, in November 2024, Roger examines the replica mile post returned to the village by Somerset Council conservators – just in time for the talk *Somerset Fingerposts, Signposts, Milestones and Tollhouses* by Richard Raynesford, of the Milestone Society, and Janet Dowding, author of *The Toll Houses of Somerset* at our November meeting..



: A large group of Friends and visitors attended a highly successful meeting at Cross Memorial Hall when Richard Raynesford emphasised that Somerset retains a significant number of historic signposts, many locally manufactured. He commended that the vigilance of local councils and heritage groups have ensured that such posts are valued, conserved and, where damaged, replaced. Richard's slides illustrated the wide variety of types of signposts to be found and, through his judicious use of old postcards, he was able to set these signposts in earlier contexts. Assisted by Janet Dowding, author of *The Tollhouses of Somerset*, Richard then described and illustrated some of the range of surviving tollhouses, noting that

many have been structurally altered over the years. The local emphasis of the afternoon was further enhanced by the presence of three fascinating examples: the replica Cross mile post, a boundary marker that was on the turnpike road between

Compton Bishop and Weare parishes: and a very early AA sign which used to be at the junction of Old Coach Road and Webbington Road, Cross, but which had been lost to view and forgotten for decades since the village was bypassed by the new section of A38 in 1930.

Following the talk, many Friends remained in the Hall, eager to discuss the subject of the talk and to enjoy the tea, cakes and mince pies provided.



Footnote: Richard Parker and his wife, Elizabeth – a member of Compton Bishop Parish Council (pictured left with the replica mile post), were kind enough to bring the three exhibits to Cross Memorial Hall for the meeting. The original damaged mile post rescued from the A38 some years ago is now in the care of South West Heritage.

THE EDWARDIAN CHRISTMAS

*Christmas is coming. The goose is getting fat
Please put a penny in the old man's hat.
If you haven't got a penny, a ha'penny will do.
If you haven't got a ha'penny, God bless you.*



That carol, listed as a traditional English or Victorian folk song sums up the spirit of the season for many. But one of our members, Yvonne Bell, is a veritable mine of information about festive seasons past, thanks to her study of the many Edwardian magazines, including Punch, books, sheet music, Christmas cards and postcards, in her collection, and the



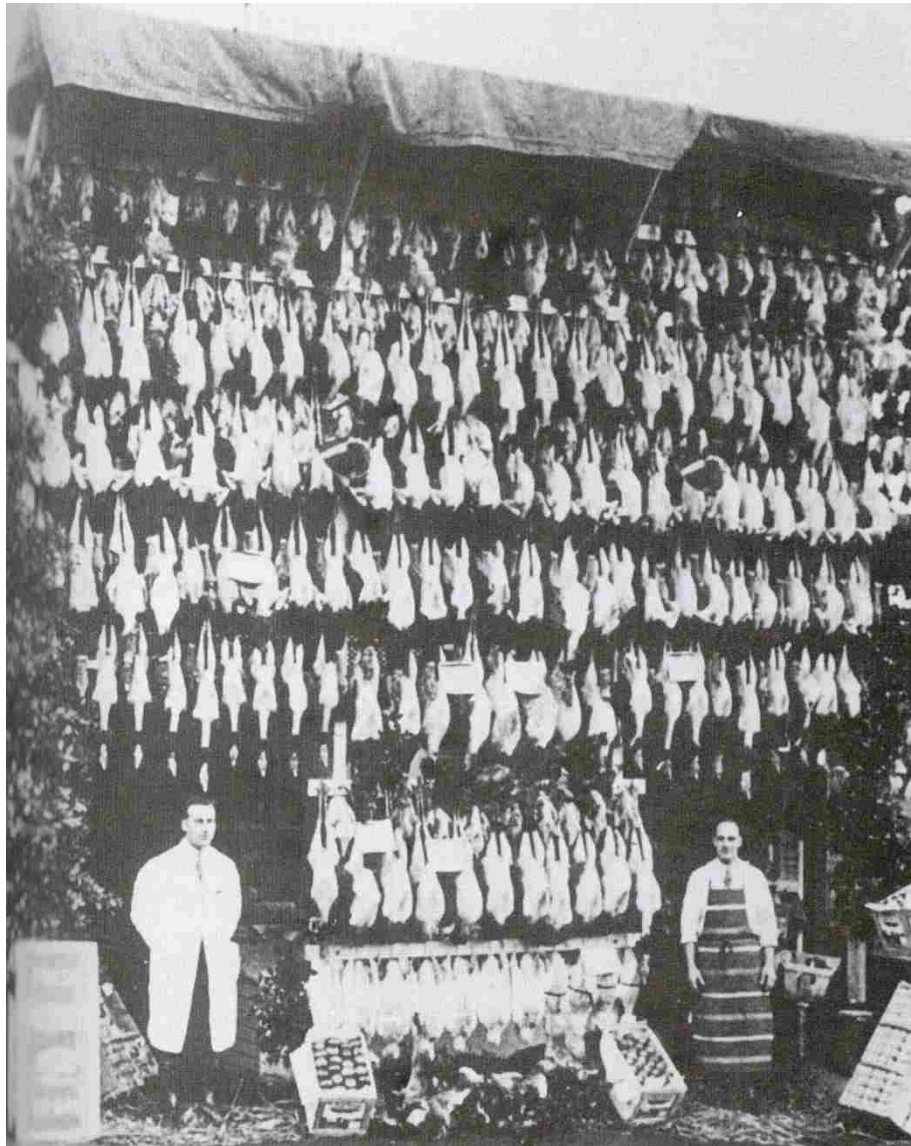
memories and diaries of a teacher friend, Mrs. Chipperfield (Chippie) 1890-1993 . **Yvonne** writes:

Our shopping habits and search for bargains have changed little, it would seem, from this conversation reported by *Harpers Monthly Magazine* in 1900: *Estelle: "I'm going shopping for Christmas presents tomorrow. Do you want to come too?" Mabel: "No I can't say I do. The fact is I've made all my purchases. Did it before the holiday rush began." Estelle: "When did you go?" Mabel: "About the middle of last January in the Sales!"*

Shop windows were decorated not much more than a week before Christmas with holly, cotton wool balls threaded to resemble snow, and strings of jelly sweets. The streets became very festive, and tradesmen such as milkmen, greengrocers, butchers and bakers decorated their delivery carts and horses' harnesses with holly and bells.

Although generally turkey graced the tables of the better off, goose was very popular, with payments into a Goose Club through the year to cover the cost.

As Christmas Day was the only day off for most, bakers kept on their ovens over Christmas so that folk, particularly in the country, were able to carry their goose or joint in its pan to be cooked, at a fee of course! Then after church they could proudly carry their Christmas dinner home, covered with a teacloth.



A Winscombe butcher's Christmas display, as shown in Chris Howell's *The Mendips In Old Photographs* (Alan Sutton Publishing, 1990)

For the poor, rabbit was more usual: with its ears pinned back, it could be carved like a fowl. Pigeon pie was another delicacy, and apparently in deepest Somerset, blackbird pie was much enjoyed!

Christmas cards and postcards were delivered just a day or two before Christmas, and even on the day itself. Often they looked more like general greetings cards, seldom picturing anything vaguely festive. Instead there were children, birds, sailing boats, flowers, and general greetings such as *Lest We Forget*, *Sweet Memories* or *Loving Greetings*.



Postcards were sent mostly by the working class as they were considerably less expensive, often more light-hearted featuring children dressed as angels or obediently in bed waiting for Santa. Even puppies and kittens were featured Christmas decorations consisting of paper

flowers and chains, and much holly and mistletoe, were put up on Christmas Eve. My friend Chippie told me how a highlight for her was to be taken to Bristol Temple Meads Station to meet aunts off the train on Christmas morning. The engines and guards' vans were decorated, and the crews took great pride in outdoing their colleagues on other trains.

There were no Christmas trees in the streets, and only real ones in people's homes. These would be decorated with bells, real candles, glass baubles and twisted glitter, according to Chippie, provided by the silver paper saved from the cigarette packets.

Edwardians being very patriotic, a Union Jack often sat on top of the tree, if not hung among the general decorations. Those real candles were used freely – fixed into little metal containers clipped to the branches, and the man of the house generally lit them after the Christmas meal before the family were led into





the brightly-lit sitting room around the tree to sing a carol or two before the candles were blown out and presents distributed...usually wrapped in brown paper, tied with string!

Through the evening, before the era of radio and television, everyone was expected to “do a turn,” perhaps playing the piano, singing, or giving a recitation. I have *A Book of Really Good Recitations* of the time, while sheet music suitably easy to perform was readily available and I have a large collection of these pieces with their attractive, colourful covers.

Life returned to normal for most on Boxing Day when shopkeepers’ errand boys delivered boxes to the most valued customers, containing gifts such as wine, cheese and ham. Christmas in those years around the turn of the 20th century wasn’t the long holiday it has become today, but it was probably more enjoyed and remembered with much nostalgia as a magical time!



Edwardian Christmas cards ranged from summery optimism to the slightly weird, and to childish charm

