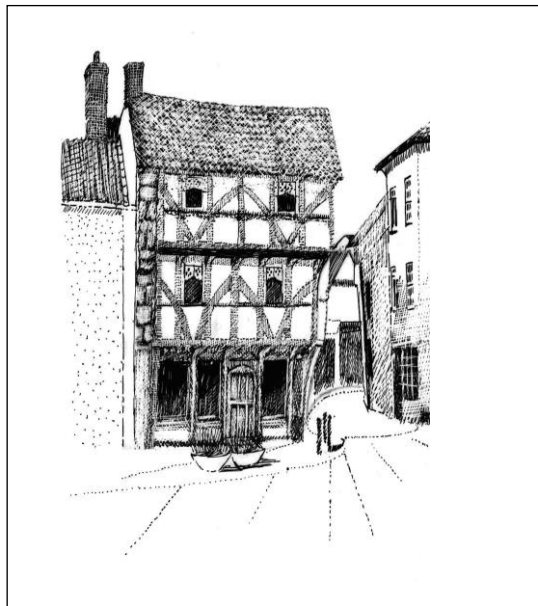


Issue No 8  
December 2023

# *Retrospect*

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](mailto:moorlandfm@btinternet.com) and contributions to editor Ian Tabrett at [tabrett.cross@btinternet.com](mailto:tabrett.cross@btinternet.com)

## Dates for your diary

**Friday December 8: *Christmas Social and Quiz*** 7pm at The Lamb Inn, Weare, Fully booked now.

**Monday December 11: *Christmas coffee morning*** at The Lamb, Axbridge, 11.30am. Join the Museum Trust for a free coffee and mince pie.

**Please let Liz know, as above, by December 4 if you will attend.**

*As for 2024, we have a full and we hope fascinating programme*

## New Year dates

**Wednesday January 17, 2024: *Winthill excavations and treasures.*** Talk by David Bromwich, Ian Tabrett and John Chapman.

This will be a unique and almost certainly a never-to-be-repeated occasion with two of the speakers – John Chapman and Ian Tabrett – who were involved in the excavations right from the beginning in 1954, and David Bromwich, who became involved not long after and has since produced a detailed and definitive report on investigations and finds at the site over three decades.

In fact, John wrote the very first report on the work for the former Axbridge Caving



Group and Archaeological Society's *Journal* in September 1955. He detailed the finding of Roman and Medieval foundations, a number of human burials, many mostly fourth century bronze coins and ornaments, and large quantities of pottery fragments. Two years later the *Journal* commissioned and published a report by London Museum director Dr D B Harden on the most exciting find of all: what became known as the Winthill glass bowl, an illustration of which graced the front cover. Of

course a replica of the bowl, human remains and other finds are now displayed in the King John's Hunting Lodge Museum for all to see.

**Cross Memorial Hall 2pm. Visitors £5, refreshments £2**

**Thursday February 15: *Ice Age mammals on Mendip: caves to conservation.*** Talk by Professor Danielle Schreve.

**We have been invited to join the Westbury Society at Westbury Village Hall, 7.30pm.** Parking is limited so car-sharing is essential. This is the annual Barry Lane memorial lecture: he was an archaeologist and for many years secretary of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society

**Wednesday February 21: *Time to have fun, fun to have time.***

Talk by John Page.

King John's Hunting Lodge, 2pm. Visitors £5, refreshments £2

### **Christmas in the workhouse, Axbridge style**

Mention the word "workhouse" to even our grandparents and the reaction would have been of absolute horror. The establishments were regarded as places of last resort – prisons almost – for the destitute, elderly, frail and unmarried mothers, right up to the late 1920s. However, conditions in Axbridge's huge workhouse (pictured in



2000) were perhaps rather better and more humane than most. And at least one year provided some light relief for its inmates.

**Margaret Jordan** writes: A group of worthy citizens came to bring Christmas cheer to the inmates of Axbridge Union Workhouse in 1879. The *Weston Mercury* reported:

"The donors entered most heartily, dividing themselves into groups that visited the various wards with many a kind and cheery word they gave the infirm and aged rugs and slippers, and the young were not forgotten being given a supply of sugar plums, bon-bons and oranges.

"This part of the proceedings over, the visitors numbering about 20 including the chair and vice-chair of the Board of Guardians, took tea in the Masters' room. The large hall was tastefully decorated by the respected master and matron, Mr and Mrs Waddon, with banners expressing significant opinions were hung. These included 'May the Chairman and Guardians be blessed with good health,' 'Blessings on the Benevolent' and 'God save the Queen.'

"The tables had been laid with viands, the spacious hall was soon filled with consumers, and the devouring process commenced. Cake after cake soon vanished and could the transforming scene have been publicly witnessed it must have produced moisture in the eye."

The *Weston Mercury's* reporter went on: "Tea over, the tables were cleared and preparations were made for the evening's entertainment, which commenced with a Christmas madrigal especially rendered by Rev .F.C. Skey (vicar of Weare) and the Misses Yatman, with Miss Emily Yatman on the piano.

"After many renditions by the benefactors came what was evidently the song of the evening: *The Gypsy Countess*, a duet given in the most charming manner by Miss Yatman and Mr.H.Law which fairly brought the house down to rapturous applause."

**Ian Tabrett** adds: an article by John Rigalsford in the Rooksbridge village website gives a great deal of fascinating information. The Axbridge District Union Workhouse was built in 1838 at a cost of £4,496 17s 6d to accommodate 250 people. They came from 38 parishes, ranging from Wrington and Blagdon to Burnham-on-Sea, and from Wedmore to Kewstoke. At that time, the huge range of buildings was in Compton Bishop parish, until boundary changes in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. It closed in 1929 and is now apartments.

There were wards for tramps, vagrants and paupers; separate ones for boys and girls under 14, able-bodied men and women between 14 and 60, and those over 60 – again with the sexes in separate wards. But Mr Rigalsworth's verdict is that



the Axbridge workhouse was “mostly run as humanely as possible subject to the rules and regulations of the time.” Richard Trew, the Mayor (pictured left), was appointed clerk of the Board of Guardians of the Axbridge Union almost from the beginning until his death in 1874. He was responsible for the setting up, overseeing the conduct, administration and running of the workhouse. He clearly had a humanitarian view of the poor and needy, and he worked tirelessly for their benefit.

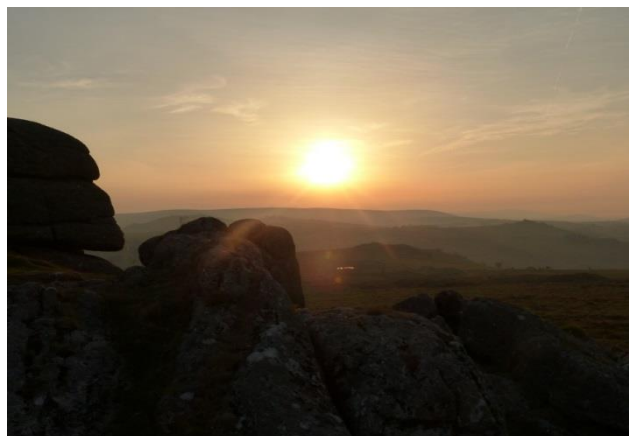
In 1836, the Poor Law Commission had sent out diet sheets for workhouses to follow – for instance, breakfast of bread and gruel was followed by dinner, which might consist of cooked meats, pickled pork or bacon with vegetables, potatoes, yeast dumpling, soup and suet, or rice pudding. Supper was normally bread, cheese and broth, and sometimes with butter or potatoes. Throughout most of its life, the health of inmates was looked after by local doctors, but in 1903 a large and impressive infirmary for them was built in the grounds. Pictured below is part of the central block today.





*Staff and Board of Guardians photographed in 1929 to mark the workhouse closure*

### **Our Sacred Spaces**



In their lavishly-illustrated talk, Phil and Sue Thorne described their visits to sites across England and Wales which have special spiritual significance. Many of these locations are prehistoric stone circles and rows, Neolithic long barrows, woodland groves and water features such as lakes, waterfalls and springs. Their relative isolation (like Haytor Rocks on Dartmoor at sunset, above) and stillness enhance the ability of visitors to absorb the spirit of the environment, while well-known sites such as Avebury are often crowded, making it more difficult to experience their full significance. Phil and Sue's pictures and descriptions of the locations, many of which are easily reached from here,

provided powerful encouragement to Friends to visit for themselves.



Examples included Glastonbury, Stanton Drew (pictured left is the Megalithic stones known as The Cove in the garden of the Druids Arms pub, close to Stanton Drew's stone circle) and Brent Knoll as well as ones further afield in Devon, Cornwall, the Welsh borderland and the Lake District. Clearly Sue and Phil are enthusiastic travellers! Their talk included enlightening personal anecdotes and gentle humour, and was clearly enjoyed by their audience. **David Roberts**

Sue Thorne has written two books, *The Ever Turning Wheel* and the *Seasons of the Wheel*, which are available via Amazon. List of sites shown attached.

### **Avalon addition**

Last summer, Friends of King John's Hunting Lodge visited the Avalon Marshes Centre, as reported in the October edition of *Retrospect*. You might like to know that a detailed article by Richard Brunning appears in the December issue of *Current Archaeology* (issue 405). He describes the new open-air museum and how it brings to life Somerset's Iron Age, Roman, Saxon and Viking past.

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