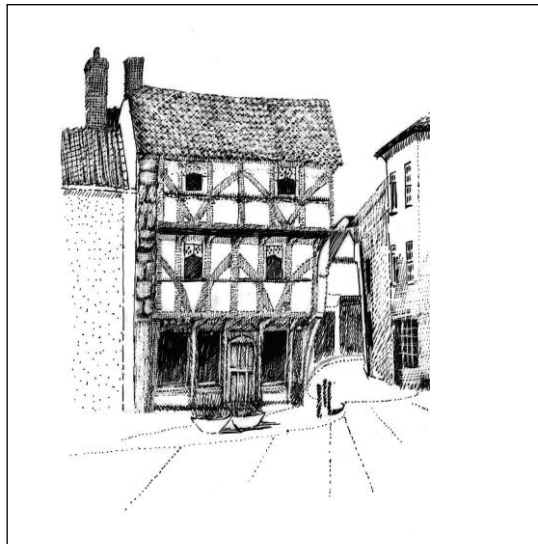


# Retrospect

Issue No 10, February 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](mailto:moorlandfm@btinternet.com) and contributions to editor Ian Tabrett at [tabrett.cross@btinternet.com](mailto:tabrett.cross@btinternet.com)

## **DIARY DATES**

**Thursday February 15: Ice Age mammals on Mendip: caves to conservation.** Barry Lane memorial lecture by Professor Danielle Schreve. **We have been invited to join the Westbury Society at Westbury Village Hall, 7.30pm. Fee £2.50.** Minibus, fare £4, pick-ups for those who have booked seats through Liz at Cross Memorial Hall, 6.30 pm; Axbridge Square/Cheddar Road, 6.45 pm ; Cheddar, 7pm. **Please let Liz know by email as above by Sunday 11 February if you would like to be picked up, and where.**

## AND THEN...

**Wednesday February 21:** *Time to have fun, fun to have time* - talk by John Page. Meet Town Hall, 2pm, later visit **King John's Hunting Lodge** and after refreshments, there will be an informal chat about the progress of the Friends, finances and future plans. Donations welcomed.

**March 20:** *China Comes to Wells*. Talk by Dr Oliver Kent on a pottery hoard found in Wells. **Cross Memorial Hall, 2pm; non-members £5, refreshments £2**

During the renovation of an old house in Cathedral Green, Wells, in the early 1800s, a disused cellar was filled with building rubble and an enormous amount of unwanted domestic pottery and glassware. Some 30 years ago, the cellar was excavated to reveal almost 700 pieces ranging from wine bottles and drinking glasses to coarse pottery and fine porcelain, leaving the questions: who amassed the collection, and when? And what does the pottery say about trade with China and life in Wells in the 18th century? The speaker helped to stage a display of some of the finds in Wells Museum that's on until April 12.

## A TREASURE FOUND, AND A (DEEP) MYSTERY SOLVED



A sign declaring: "Full house" was needed for our January meeting describing the excavations and treasures found at Winthill, many of which are in the King John's Hunting Lodge Museum. Every chair at the Cross Memorial Hall was needed for the audience – including a number of very welcome guests from the Banwell Society of Archaeology – for the presentation by John Chapman, David Bromwich and Ian Tabrett.

The proceedings opened with a video welcome from John, recorded at his home by John Page because he recently had a spell in hospital. He recalled how he first visited the Winthill site at the age of 10 (he is now 90), and later took part in excavations there from 1954 to 1956 with the Axbridge Caving Group and Archaeological Society. John also revealed that a close friend, the late Professor Mick Aston, had wanted to base an episode of TV's *Time Team* series at Winthill, but was refused permission by the landowner. Fortunately John was well enough to attend the meeting and to take part in the question-and-answer session which followed the presentation.



Ian then recounted how his father worked at Winthill Farm and regularly returned home with his pockets bulging with fragments of Roman pottery, coins, bronze items and flints which he had picked up – many of which he later presented to the Axbridge museum. Reports of such finds on the land went back some 300 years, and in 1811 historian George Bennett, a solicitor who lived in Banwell but had his office in Axbridge, wrote that foundations of ancient buildings and human burials had been found.



The entire Roman and later occupation site covers almost 30 acres. Two of the fields are named Chapel Close – where both the Axbridge and Banwell groups excavated in the 1950s and 1960s – and Chapel Leaze, where many human remains have been uncovered either by ploughing or badgers. In fact Ian and John are thought to be the only two people still living who took part in the Axbridge digs, which uncovered extensive remains of Roman buildings and several dozen Christian human burials – including two of children – thought to date from the fifth to the eighth centuries.

Ian, then aged 15, and the late Jim Hunt were the two excavators who in 1956 uncovered the famous Winthill glass bowl, which has been identified as being made in the Rhineland in Germany in the mid-4<sup>th</sup> century. It is said to be the best of 18 examples found in Europe, all showing similar hunting scenes and

almost certainly made by the same skilled craftsman. The engraving was achieved with either a flint or similar hard stone, and the message around the rim has been

translated as “Long life to you and yours” and ending with the encouragement: “Drink and live well.”



The bowl was near the corner of a Roman building on the original floor and was in pieces, as was a glass drinking vessel lying beside it. This also had been broken in ancient times but repaired by its owner. Both showed signs of heavy use all those centuries ago.

David has produced a highly-detailed and profusely-illustrated report on all the archaeological investigations by the Axbridge and Banwell societies, and he hopes it will be published later this year. He described signs of occupation from at least the Iron Age, with evidence of Roman presence from the first century. He speculated that rather than being a Roman villa, which would have had mosaics, under-floor heating and painted wall plaster which have never been found, it was a large working settlement serving passing trade and possibly the Charterhouse lead-mining industry.



He put on display illustrated pages from his report of finds ranging from pottery to bronze ornaments, bone and iron items, glass fragments and worked flints, together with examples from each. John Page brought the

replica of the glass bowl, which is normally on display in the Axbridge museum.

During discussions, John Chapman was able to solve a mystery which baffled many: during the Axbridge dig after part of the trench floor suddenly collapsed revealing a wide shaft cut in the solid rock.



Caving enthusiasts shored up the entrance, lowered themselves down and discovered it was around 40ft deep. It is now thought to have been an unsuccessful attempt by 19<sup>th</sup> miners to find ochre, which existed in quantity in the western Mendip hills. A second pit, hacked just 5ft down in the rock, was found nearby. He revealed that when the trench was refilled, most of the human bones were re-interred in the deep shaft.



***The grids including the one in which the pit was discovered and where work is still in progress, and part of the original trench***

Many of the audience of around 50 stayed to enjoy refreshments provided by Madeleine Roberts and Liz Scott, to question the speakers, and to chat. This had been described as a one-off occasion, the first and probably last time the three speakers would come together to make such a detailed presentation, and Liz summed up what so many said: "The talks were superb and obviously of interest to all. With a full house, we couldn't have wished for more!"

***Early reports of the Winthill excavations appeared in the Axbridge Caving Group and Archaeological Society's Journal, and the Banwell Society of Archaeology's Search. A large collection of contemporary photographs taken by the late Jim Hunt are in the care of John Chapman***

***March 8: Banwell Society of Archaeology have a talk by David Elsey - Banwell water main excavations, 2012. Banwell Village Hall, 7.30pm***

## **EVENTS THIS YEAR AT KING JOHN'S HUNTING LODGE MUSEUM**

**March 29 (Good Friday) doors open for the season**, then official opening ceremony **Saturday 6 April 10am** 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.

**Late July-early September:** local school.

**September, October:** paintings by George Cumberland, one-time Axbridge landowner and gentleman farmer, linking with a book by Jane Evans.

***Next time in Retrospect:***

**STEAMING BACK TO LIFE – AXBRIDGE'S LINK TO**  
**A SUPERB TV DOCUMENTARY**