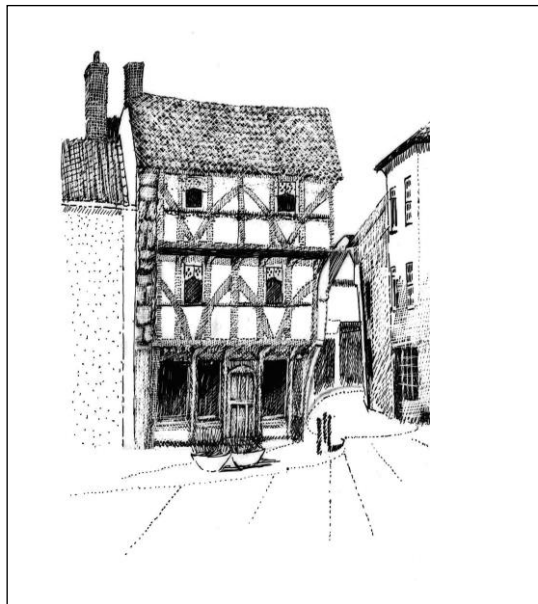


Issue No 7
November 2023

Retrospect

Newsletter
of
the Friends of King John's Hunting
Lodge

News, views and events



Retrospect 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, articles and suggestions for the future – and please tell us if you would prefer afternoon or evening meetings, or perhaps a combination of both. Send all your feedback to Liz by email at moorlandfm@btinternet.com

Dates for your diary

Wednesday November 15 : *Our Sacred Spaces*, an illustrated talk by Sue and Phil Thorne on many locations from Cornwall to the Lake



District to find many amazing sites with pre-Christian stone circles and other remains, and sacred springs and water courses.

The venue is Cross Memorial Hall at 7.30 pm. £5 for non-members, refreshments £2

Friday December 8: *Christmas Social and Quiz* at The Lamb Inn, Weare, with a Christmas special menu. There is ample parking.

Please contact Liz by telephone at 01934 733341 or email as above by November 25 if you would like to attend, with your menu choices – see next page. Partners and friends are most welcome.

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 8 if you will attend.

THE LAMB AT WEARE CHRISTMAS MENU 2023

STARTERS, £6.95

Tomato and basil soup served with warm bread (V)

Traditional prawn cocktail

Cajun spiced chicken strips served on mixed leaf salad with lemon mayo dip (or quorn for V option)

Mini home-made beef patties topped with cherry tomatoes and served with home-made chutney

MAINS, £14.95

Roast turkey with all the Christmas trimmings

Home-made salmon, leek and dill filo tart

Baked butternut squash with home-made chestnut and apricot filling and melted Cheddar cheese topping (V)

Home-made spiced pork and potato short-crust pastry pie

All served with roast potatoes and vegetables of the day

DESSERTS, £6.95

Fresh fruit salad with brandysnaps and crème fraiche (V)

Christmas pudding, served with home-made orange cream (V)

Home-made chocolate and cherry trifle (V)

Home-made Christmas apple and mincemeat crumble and custard (V)

Please note the following is used in the food preparation: celery, cereals containing gluten, crustaceans, eggs, fish, lupin, milk, molluscs, nuts and peanuts. Please ask if you need further information

More dates for your diary

Wednesday January 17, 2024: Winthill excavations and treasures.

Talk by David Bromwich, Ian Tabrett and John Chapman. More details next month

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

Thursday February 15: Recent excavations at Ebbor Gorge.

Talk by Professor Danielle Schreve.

We have been invited to join the Westbury Society for this Barry Lane memorial lecture at Westbury Village Hall, time to be confirmed.

Barry 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.

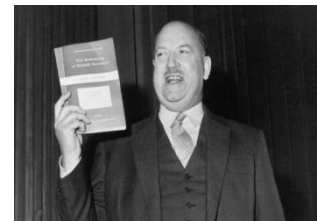
Talk by John Page, King John's Hunting Lodge, 2pm

The Strawberry Line Past, Present and Future



Axbridge station in 1962

Who would have thought it – booing and hissing interrupting one of our monthly talks, which usually attract nothing more than a studious hush then questions and compliments? Well, it happened in October while Lois Brenchley was addressing an audience of more than 30 Friends and visitors at Cross Memorial Hall on the history of the Cheddar Valley railway line, now the Strawberry Line walk and cycle-way. The hostile reception came when Lois projected a picture of the easily-recognisable features of Dr Richard Beeching, whose plan led to the closure of thousands of miles of railway lines and hundreds of stations, including of course the Cheddar Valley branch. However, in thanking the speaker, John Page issued something of a reprimand: Dr B was behind the research aimed at slimming-down the rail network, he said, but the real villain of the piece was Transport Minister Ernest Marples, whose family firm built roads and motorways and who swiftly ordered the axe to fall on much of the rail network...



Lois's involvement and leading part in the project to breath new life into the route from Yatton to Wells and beyond began 45 years ago. She and the other enthusiasts faced a five-year battle with bureaucracy and some local hostility before any progress could be made on the Strawberry Line project.

Her superbly-illustrated talk began with a look at the history and development of the broad-gauge line by the Bristol and Exeter Railway. On 26 February 1867 there were great festivities at Axbridge to celebrate the cutting of the first turf at Shute Shelve, and rain fortunately didn't dampen that occasion or the opening ceremony when the track reached Cheddar and its elaborate station in 1870. Until the very end, Axbridge with its smartly-decorated station buildings continued to cater for both passenger and goods traffic – including the all-important strawberry trade which, at its height,



was supported by well over 100 local growers. And the meeting heard encouraging news that the main building was soon to be brought back to life with the opening of a Men's Shed and possibly later a Repair Shop to be run by volunteers.

Lois, one of the driving forces behind both the Sandford Station Heritage Centre and Winscombe's Millenium Green, was brimming with optimism for the future. She revealed that it was "highly likely" that the old Clevedon branch from Yatton could be the basis of an extension of the Strawberry Line multi-user path, while after the opening this September of a lovely section between Westbury-sub-Mendip and Easton, more work was being done between Wells and Shepton Mallet.

Ian Tabrett



Shute Shelve tunnel in1962...



...and now

Axbridge and District Museum Trust Stewards' and Friends' annual social evening

The event on October 18 was held at Axbridge Town Hall, when John Page gave a talk on the Rev Thomas Gould, vicar of Axbridge from 1766 until 1796. **John writes:** "Most people know the Rev. Gould from comments made by Hannah More that he was 'intoxicated about six times a week, and very frequently is prevented from preaching by two black eyes, honestly earned by fighting.' She also mentioned: 'We waited first on the vicar, Mr. G----, but the black shades of his character are too melancholy even to be sketched here.' So was her verdict justified?

"Although the Axbridge Pageant does include a scene featuring the Rev Gould, their explanation of the reasons for Hannah More's view doesn't reflect the real story. There is no suggestion that he was having an affair with someone else's wife (as proposed in 2010) or that he was having financial problems (as proposed in 2022). The truth is rather more extraordinary.

"He was born in South Brent (now Brent Knoll) and educated at Hertford College, Oxford. Then he was made curate of the church at Brent Knoll, where he remained for about 14 years. There was an absentee vicar, so at the age of 21 or 22 he would have been effectively in charge of the church and its congregation. We can only guess what the local people thought about his preaching, which was obviously based on what he had learned at Oxford but, at the end of his time there, three vicars complained to the Bishop of Bath and Wells that what he was preaching was, in fact, heresy.



Axbridge Pageant, 2022, which like its predecessors gave a depiction of the Rev Gould's 18th century antics

"The Bishop arranged a date for them all to discuss this at the palace in Wells. The next week, one of the vicars died, the second rode to tell the third and, on his way

home, fell off his horse and died shortly after. The third vicar survived until the day of the meeting, but on his way to Wells, fell off his horse and died. So only Thomas Gould met the Bishop that day and was given the living of Axbridge, made vacant by the death of the vicar, a Huguenot who had been very popular.

“Thomas arrived with quite a reputation – you don’t argue with this man! The result was that his church was full for some time after, but as the novelty wore off, he decided to enter politics and became a Capital Burgess of Axbridge at a time when the involvement of clergy in local politics was unheard of. It was the rule that a new Capital Burgess became mayor at the first elections after they are sworn in, and alderman the following year. In February 1768 he was elected a Capital Burgess and became mayor that October and alderman the following year.

“During 1769, probably at his instigation, a number of things began to change in Axbridge to the annoyance of many. One was that the banners which long had been used to lead parades on national holidays were banned, along with payments for beer which were handed out to the trade guilds. This broke a tradition probably going back 100 years and caused a major upset among members of the guilds, which included every tradesman and employer in the town.

“Perhaps as a sop to this, shortly after, the burgesses were stripped of their right to be given money at any Session, though that did not seem to change the fact that most of the money was used for their own entertainment rather than for the greater good of the town. In 1771 the then curate of Axbridge, the Rev Jonathan Gegg, was elected a Capital Burgess. The Revd. Gould remained an alderman until October 1772 when it is noted that ‘Thomas Gould, Clerk, (for some reasonable cause) be displaced from the office of Alderman.’ Heading the Capital Burgesses signing this decree was J. Gegg, Mayor and curate who led the group petitioning to displace the vicar. Unfortunately there is no way of knowing what ‘some reasonable cause’ actually meant!

“Most of the income of the Corporation came from rental of property owned by them, and most of the outgoings appear to have gone on food, drink and tobacco for the burgesses. Major confrontations now arose after numerous incidents involving Capital Burgesses, which led to expensive law suits in London, with the cost running into many hundreds of pounds. A protest was organised by the Inferior Burgesses at the Capital Burgesses using the corporate income to pay for these actions, and this issue underlay the view of Hannah More that ‘the town [was] all anarchy and malice, and pretty equally divided in enmity.’

“A Government report under the Municipal Corporation Act of 1835 noted that the accounts of the period were not in good order and was scathing about the whole running of the town council during the time of the Rev Gould.”

After the talk, refreshments were provided, for which thanks were given to Liz Scott. As for those trade guild banners, they are among the oldest surviving in the country, and it is hoped they can be restored in the near future.