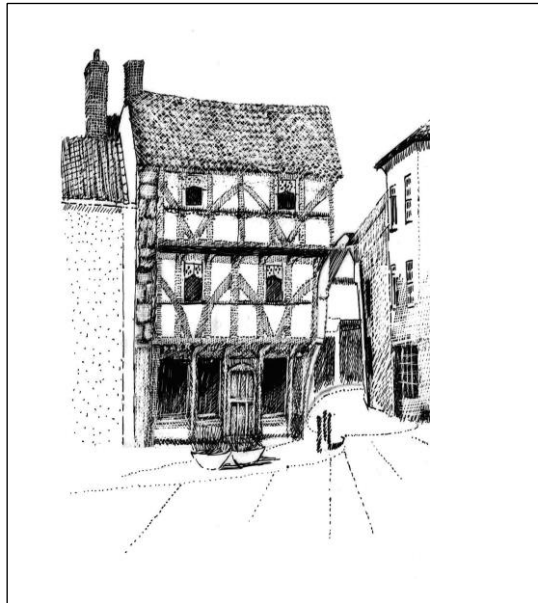


# Retrospect

Issue No 18, October 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 really 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) These are vital to continue making *Retrospect* an interesting and informative read, and are urgently needed!

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## **YOUR DIARY DATES**

**Tuesday October 15:** Museum Annual General Meeting, Axbridge Church Rooms, 7.30pm.

**October 23:** share with stewards of Axbridge and District Museum Trust a visit to the National Trust property of Dyrham Park. **All spaces taken up.**

**November 20: Somerset Fingerposts, Signposts, Milestones and Tollhouses.** Talk by Richard Raynesford, of the Milestone Society, with introduction by Janet Dowding, author of *The Toll Houses of Somerset*. **Cross Memorial Hall, 2.30pm; non-members £5, refreshments £2**

**December 13:** Christmas meal and quiz, Lamb Inn, Weare, 7pm. Menu choices to follow.

**January 15:** Members get a chance to speak on local topics of their choice. Cross Memorial Hall (CMH); 2.30pm. Visitors £5, refreshments £2

## **September's Events**

September started well with a coffee morning at the Almshouse and was followed later in the month by a stimulating talk given by John Crockford-Hawley.

### **KJHL Coffee Mornings.**

Trustee **Pauline Trapp** writes: "Regular coffee mornings are organised by Dean Packham as a 'thank you' to our faithful museum stewards. Trustees and Friends of



the Museum are all invited. We had a happy gathering on 4 September in the Almshouse tearoom. Stewards had the chance to meet and discuss museum matters. There was a request to understand more about the collection not on display and in storage in the Old Court Room. Arrangements are being made to visit the Old Court Room during the winter to see some of the collection. Our next coffee morning will be a Christmas gathering on Saturday 14 December at 11am, venue to be

decided. Christmas jumpers are optional! Please email Dean Packham at [packham172@btinternet.com](mailto:packham172@btinternet.com) if you wish to attend this jolly, festive gathering to which stewards, Trustees and Friends are warmly invited, Do bring anyone who might wish to volunteer at the museum.”

The September coffee morning was an opportunity for the Friends of KJHL to meet



Pauline and Dean (pictured left). The Axbridge District Museum Trust (ADMT) organises the museum. It consists of three professional advisors/administrators and currently eight volunteer trustees. Pauline is one of the volunteers and Dean one of the professional administrators. In fact, he is the museum manager and with his background in business management was formerly duty manager of Tesco's in

Cheddar. His role as museum manager has developed as he has taken over many of the functions previously performed by Kate Browne. He organises the stewards' rota, is a key holder and is responsible for Health and Safety as well as much else on a day-to-day basis. He has lived in Axbridge for nearly 20 years and is a keen cricketer, having been captain of Axbridge Cricket Club. He is also an Arsenal supporter and can usually be seen around Axbridge sporting his Arsenal shirt.

### **Of bells, gargoyles, organs and very much more**

**Madeleine Roberts** reports: On 18 September our talk was by John Crockford–Hawley, Mayor of Weston-super-Mare, and his topic was the resort's churches. Those unable to attend missed a fascinating evening!

John took us on a lavishly-illustrated journey through time, from the Norman period through the Reformation to the Victorians and the present day. He has visited all the churches, noting everything from their bells, alters, pulpits, lecterns, gargoyles, statues, seating, art works, hatchments, tapestries, window glass, to their organs and use of space. His talk was quite a journey: for example, who knew that Uphill



isn't named as a result of the Saxo-Norman church of St. Nicholas-on-the-Hill **(above)** being on the hill, but because it was by the pill or river - phill not hill. Weston's other Norman churches were St Martin's at Worle and, although long gone, the original church of St. John the Baptist in Lower Church Road, which was replaced in 1810 to provide a more appropriate venue for fashionable visitors from Bath. It seems they were seeking fresh air away from the "stinking sewer" that Bath became in the summer. The curate in 1810 was the Rev. Wadham Pigott, who in



**Weston's St John the Baptist Church, built in 1810 to replace the Norman original** good traditional fashion was brother of the Lord of the Manor. It was this family who gave £10,000 for the demolition of the old church and the building of a new one. But it was also the family who gave rise to the Smyth-Pigott family when the illegitimate son of the Smyths of Ashton Court married the illegitimate daughter of the Pigott family of Brockley Court. The Smyth-Pigotts ultimately became very respectable but, nevertheless it was the Rev. Smyth-Pigott who, with a Mr Prince, founded the Agapemonites of Spaxton and caused the passing of the 1890 Clergy Disciplinary Act that allowed clergy to be dismissed for conduct unbecoming. John chose not to elaborate on this!

The 1840s saw a new wave of church building as Weston expanded. The first was the new St. Nicholas Church at Uphill in 1841 followed in 1846 by Emmanuel Church, built in Oxford Street in the Gothic style. After that came the Non-Conformist churches, and in 1858, St. Joseph's, the first Roman Catholic church **(below)**. Its construction caused considerable controversy, as Weston was very anti-Catholic



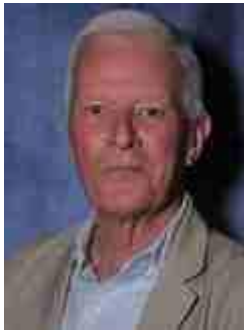
at the time and, when the Lord of the Manor converted to Catholicism, his manorial church pew at St. John's was burnt by the churchwarden.

Towards the end of the 19th century, plans were drawn up for several large churches but few were completed on the scale intended as there was a serious lack of cash. The First World War then brought a change in social attitudes, and church attendance began to decline then the 20th century brought a new style of church



design, like at St. Peter's, Milton (**above**), and more recently, St. Mark's, Worle. Other modern religious buildings include a Meeting Hall for the Plymouth Brethren, a Salvation Army Citadel, and a Christian Science Church, but as congregations

dwindled further, some churches became redundant and were re-purposed for a variety of uses such as a concert hall and a Greek Orthodox Church.



While talking about the many treasures and works of art to be found in the churches, John (**left**) reflected on the impact in the Weston area of the Dissolution of the Monasteries and the way in which clergy at the time responded to the changes. He pointed out that the prebendal stall in St. Martin's, and the pulpit at Wick St Lawrence both came from Woodspring Priory.

His depth of knowledge and lively presentation gave an enjoyable and stimulating introduction to our winter programme.

## **JOBS VACANT: MASTER AND MATRON AT AXBRIDGE WORKHOUSE – PAY £60 A YEAR**

As a follow-up to her article about Christmas in the Axbridge Workhouse (*Retrospect* December 2023) Margaret Jordan outlines research on those who became Workhouse Masters and Matrons through the years.

Margaret writes: Axbridge Union Board of Guardians was formed in 1836 and at its



first meeting, *Richard Trew* (**left**) was appointed Clerk. One of the first of his many jobs was to recruit workhouse staff by sending advertisements to local newspapers of posts needing to be filled. The advertisement in the *Weston Mercury* offered pay of £60 per year, with apartment and rations. Applications were to be completed in the applicants' own handwriting and accompanied by testimonials. The first to be appointed to the position of Workhouse Master and Matron were *Onisiphorus*

*Millard* and his wife *Mary Ann*. His wonderful name is said to be derived from St.

Onesiphorus, bishop of Calophon in Asia Minor, in Greek meaning "useful" or "bringing profit." Apparently in the Orthodox tradition, Onesiphorus (**right**) was one of the 70 disciples chosen by Jesus and sent out to preach, sometime after the selection of the Twelve Apostles. He was mentioned in the Bible by St Paul and is believed to have died a martyr in the city of Parium, not far from Ephesus on the shores of the Hellespont.

Millard was born in Wells in 1791 and he married *Mary Ann* at St.Cuthbert's Church in the city in 1818. He became a schoolmaster in Winscombe and was also Overseer of the Poor until the couple were appointed as Master and Matron of Axbridge Workhouse. He continued in post until his death in 1846 and was buried in Axbridge.



They were followed *William Bassett* and his wife *Mary*. He was born in Margate and was around 43 when he became Workhouse Master, and in 1851 the couple's daughter, Emily, was employed as the Workhouse cook.

Bassett was in post until at least 1861 but a letter in the National Archives throws a bad light on his time at the workhouse. It reported that "the Master is very often drunk" and the Matron was "a sharp woman who would stick at nothing for her own end." But as the letter was sent anonymously, perhaps we can draw the conclusion that this was just a malicious attack!

The next incumbents had an interesting and varied background: *James Salisbury* trained as a carpenter and cabinet maker. He married in 1847 in Axbridge to *Elizabeth Gulley*, who at that time was a schoolteacher at the Workhouse. The Poor Law Act of 1834 stipulated that children in workhouses should receive a basic education with a salaried schoolteacher. In the year of his marriage, James was appointed as a schoolmaster at the workhouse at £30 per year after the Board of Guardians had sent him to learn the National School System of teaching.

So now the Workhouse had both a school master and school mistress. The couple continued in those posts until 1870 when they were appointed as Master and Matron of the Workhouse, he at £60 a year – exactly the same wage as 34 years earlier – and £30 respectively. They resigned in 1877, having completed 37 years in the service of the Union.

However, they continued to live in Axbridge, both dying in 1907. Their family life had been saddened years before by the death of two very young children and two more children, aged 17 in 1873, and 24 in 1877.

Succeeding them were *James Waddon* and his wife, *Anna Maria*. He was born in South Brent in 1843 and at the age of 28 he became Registrar for Births, Marriages and Deaths, as well as Relieving Officer in Burnham-on-Sea. So, he was well experienced in the Poor Law by the time he sought employment in Axbridge.

Sadly, his wife died in 1892, forcing a break from the tradition of the Master's wife being the Matron: the Union appointed a single woman, *Lydia Whitting*, as Matron. James continued as Master until his death in 1902. Lydia later became Matron at Colston Boys' School in Bristol.

The only Workhouse Master and Matron to be appointed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century were *Claude Maurice Gane* and his wife *Mary Elizabeth*. He was born in about 1870, his





father being Master of Chippenham Workhouse, and he followed his father by becoming Master of Malmesbury Workhouse.

Claude married Mary *Elizabeth Swidenbank* in 1894 when she was Assistant Matron at the Barton Regis Workhouse in Bristol. They took up their posts in Axbridge in 1902. Mary died In 1918, and as a married couple were preferred in the posts, an advertisement for a new Master and Matron was placed. However, no appointment was made and Claude married again in 1919 to *Ellen Childe*, who was a nurse. In fact, the Ganes were still in post when the Workhouse closed in 1930.

**Margaret adds:** In writing this brief history of the Workhouse Masters and Matrons, I am grateful to Pat Hase for allowing me to take extracts from her excellent work on the Axbridge Union Workhouse, and for information on Richard Trew from the book, *Mayor of Axbridge*, by Virginia and Stanley Castle.

## **GOOD NEWS**

At a time when a number of local history societies have folded, it is heartening to learn from Sue Thorne that the North Somerset Local History Group has a full programme for 2024/5. Anyone interested in supporting them should look at their website: <https://www.burnham-on-sea.com/whatson/north-sedgemoor-local-history-group-announces-new-programme-of-local-history-talks/>

## **THANKS**

**Ian Tabrett** writes: I am most grateful to Madeleine for producing this edition of *Retrospect* while I was on holiday.