SANHS News

The newsletter of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society

Number 99, Spring 2024

Archaeology, Archive, Historic Buildings, Library, Local History, Natural History, and Publications

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Cover Picture: A Marbled White butterfly, *Melanargia galanthea*, on a Scabious flower head. SANHS Field Event with Somerset Rare Plant Group, Walk Farm, July 2018. photo: David Reid

Editorial

Not only …

175 years since the founding of SANHS in 1849. Our chair highlights some of the aspirations of our founding fathers on the next page. My *World Chronology* lists events from the year:

- Bedford College for women founded in London;
- Amelia Bloomer begins to reform women's dress;
- Robert Stephenson's cast-iron bridge opened at Newcastle upon Tyne;
- Charles Dickens commences *David Copperfield*.

Expect to hear much more about commemorative events later in the year.

… but also

150 years since the purchase by the Society of the Castle Estate in 1874 at a cost of £2,850. Here, from the same Chronology are some events from that year:

- Building Society Act in Britain protects small investors and encourages home ownership;
- Solomon introduces pressure cooking methods for canning foods;
- Thomas Hardy writes *Far from the Madding Crowd;*
- Winston Churchill born.

We expect to focus more on this event in 2025 which will represent the 150th anniversary of the first ***opening*** of the Museum.

You will hopefully find this issue packed with a good variety of articles covering all our disciplines. Sue Goodman provides a fascinating review of our library and archive collections together with advice on how to access them. There are seven reports relating to activities undertaken with grants from our Maltwood, Gray and Pat-Hill Cottingham (Natural History) funds.

The long-term future of our collective endeavours relies upon continuing interest from successive generations. I am therefore particularly pleased to have two articles on engagement with the younger generation. Amal Khreisheh explains various school programmes run by the South West Heritage Trust – and how some of the SANHS collections support that work. Chris Jessop reports on another successful year for Mick Aston's Young Archaeologists. Without the younger generation, we will be poorly placed to pitch for the next 175 years!

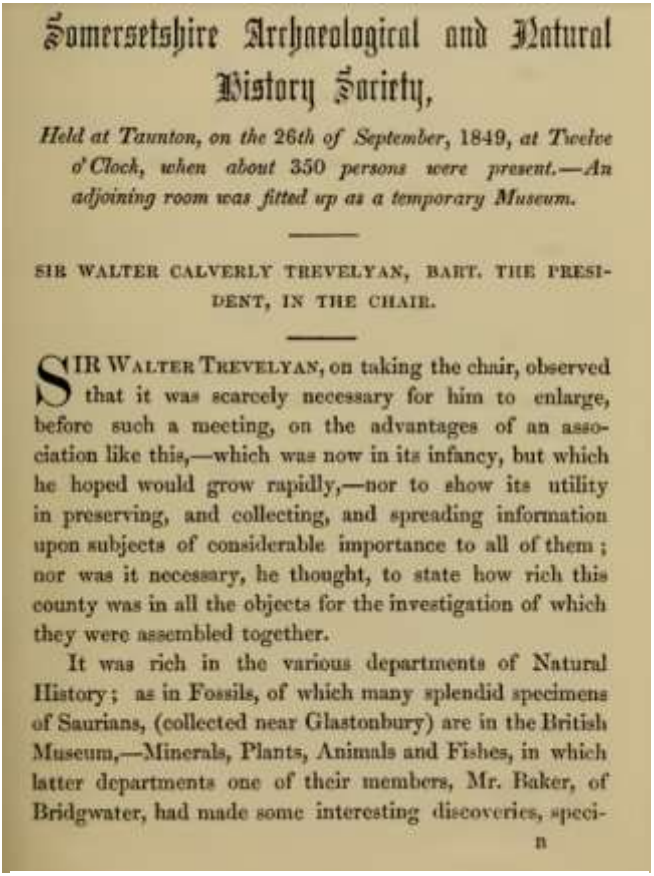
As always, thanks to everyone who has provided material for this issue. Apologies for outstanding errors or omissions which are entirely my responsibility.

Martin Salzer, East Coker, Spring 2024

From The Chair

At the 2023 AGM, Lizzie Induni took over from Chris Chanter as Chair. Here, Lizzie provides some thoughts on the earliest days of the Society, the Proceedings, which have endured throughout, and the wide range of platforms we have now for disseminating information.

At SANHS we benefit hugely from our historical records; many of our important transactions are recorded in our annual publication - *The Proceedings of Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society*, which is usually referred to as *The Proceedings*.



Somersetshire Archaeological and Natural History Society,

Held at Taunton, on the 26th of September, 1849, at Twelve o'Clock, when about 350 persons were present.—An adjoining room was fitted up as a temporary Museum.

SIR WALTER CALVERLY TREVELYAN, BART. THE PRESIDENT, IN THE CHAIR.

SIR WALTER TREVELYAN, on taking the chair, observed that it was scarcely necessary for him to enlarge, before such a meeting, on the advantages of an association like this,—which was now in its infancy, but which he hoped would grow rapidly,—nor to show its utility in preserving, and collecting, and spreading information upon subjects of considerable importance to all of them; nor was it necessary, he thought, to state how rich this county was in all the objects for the investigation of which they were assembled together.

It was rich in the various departments of Natural History; as in Fossils, of which many splendid specimens of Saurians, (collected near Glastonbury) are in the British Museum,—Minerals, Plants, Animals and Fishes, in which latter departments one of their members, Mr. Baker, of Bridgwater, had made some interesting discoveries, speci-

n

First Page of the 1849 Proceedings

I am sure that you are all aware that 2024 is 175 years since the foundation of SANHS, so I naturally went to the first *Proceedings* to find out how this happened.

I was delighted to see that Sir Walter Trevelyan, the Society's first president, had great faith in the members, with the assumption that they were so well informed about the necessity for founding the society, that it did not need to be stated. I was also pleased to see that the aims of the society – to preserve, collect and spread information on the county of Somerset -are still current 175 years later.

SANHS is still collecting and preserving (through SWHT) and also spreading information about our collections and recent discoveries.

Walter Calverley Trevelyan, 1797- 1879, of Nettlecombe Court. He was a specialist in botany, geology and antiquities and a great supporter of all education. He was a perfect choice for first president of SANHS.

175 years ago in 1849, this was done through the Proceedings. Whilst continuing with the *Proceedings* we also benefit from the website, the webinars, exhibitions, newsletter and the bulletin to propagate current knowledge on our specialist interests.

The actual anniversary commences in September 2024, and we will be celebrating our 175 years with a series of events, details of which will be announced soon.

Lizzie Induni, Chair

Our Hon. Secretary

Mrs Chris Webster is extremely busy with a wide range of SANHS activities. Here she explains how she became Hon. Secretary.

My first experience with SANHS was in 2019 when I joined the Castle Gardens gardening team after my retirement from A-level teaching. A few hours gently weeding flower beds was what I expected but the reality was a massive wholesale removal of scrub and young trees. It was just what I needed – the opportunity to work outside, using neglected muscles but primarily to work alongside a group of lovely, informative, and committed volunteers.

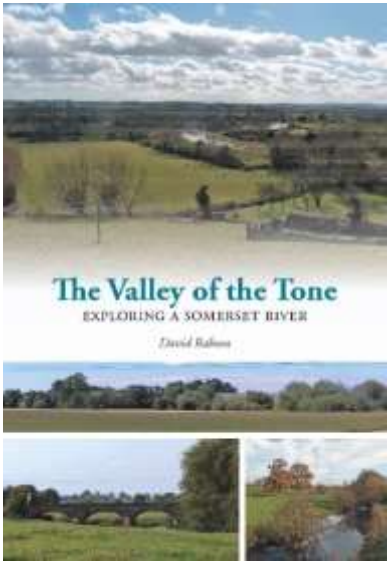
I joined the Board of Trustees in 2021 and was soon made Honorary Secretary to fill a gap. Although the post does require more time inside sitting at my computer, I still thoroughly enjoy the new opportunities that are afforded. I am never quite sure what the next task will be – this week I have been out discussing emergency lighting in the Wyndham Hall, replanting part of the Northern Gardens, a book launch as well as planning for the May AGM.

If you could do with a little more variety in your life, then I would thoroughly recommend volunteering for SANHS!

Mrs Chris Webster, Hon. Secretary

New SANHS Publication – The River Tone

Mr Chris Webster, Chair of the SANHS Publications Committee, describes our new publication, which should surely prove a popular choice for your bookshelf.



In recent years the Tone has been the subject of many official reports, but little has been written about the river as a whole for the general reader. This is a pity. From its source high on the Brendon Hills down to its confluence with the Parrett at Burrowbridge the Tone flows through an attractive and varied landscape that is full of interest.

With a Foreword by Tom Mayberry of the South West Heritage Trust and generously illustrated, this study by a geographer and long-term resident shows how the landscape has changed, using a range of examples – the taming of the Brendon Hills around the river's source; the origins of Clatworthy reservoir; the descent from the hill to the plain; the Tone as an industrial river; the rise and fall of Nynehead's parkland; the river from Bradford to the edge of Taunton; the very different landscape of Taunton and the Levels.

David Rabson was a Cambridge-educated geographer and a long-standing member of the Local History Committee of SANHS. His previous publications include 'From Somerset to the Pyrenees – in the steps of William Arthur Jones, geologist and antiquary' (SANHS 2015) and he was principal author and editor of 'The Book of Nynehead' (Halsgrove 2003).

David died in September 2021 leaving the book almost ready for publication.

Mr Chris Webster

The book, in softcover 26cm x 18cm, comprises 144 pages and is prolifically illustrated in colour and black and white. Numerous maps include those defining eight circular walks at various locations along the river.

Available now: *price: £18-95 if collected from a meeting or from the office or £23-45 to include postage and packing.*

News from the Library & Archives

Library History

SANHS began to form its magnificent Library in 1850, a year after the Society was founded. From the start, books and journals were received by purchase, exchanges with other societies, donations and bequests.

One of the rarer books - *The herbal: or general historie of plantes*, by John Gerard, 1636. 1600 pages, numerous illust. This is one of the earliest botany textbooks in English.

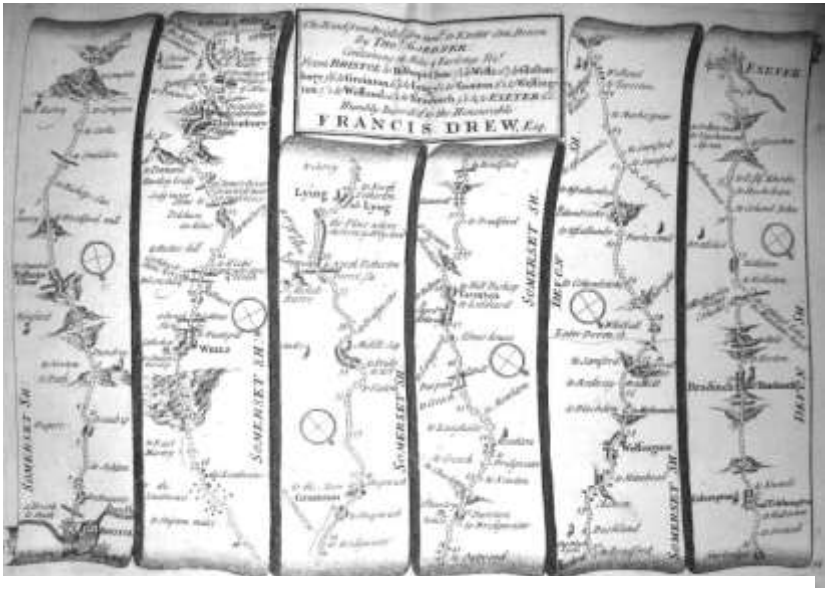
Now numbering nearly 52,000 volumes, plus 81 current and around 140 discontinued journal titles, and numerous collections of illustrations, the library is housed securely at the Somerset Heritage Centre (SHC). The subjects covered are SANHS' four main areas of interest – Archaeology, Natural History, Local History, and Historic Buildings – as well as many other items of local interest.

Special collections

Substantial collections came to SANHS from the Taunton and Somerset Institution between 1875 and 1883. Among many notable collections, that of Charles Tite stands out. His extensive collection of about 3,000 volumes is a unique and important facet of the recorded history of Somerset.

Other collections include:

- Mick Aston bequest – 2,000+ books, pamphlet boxes of leaflets, cuttings, &c, 70,000 35mm slides (3,000+ digitised at HEIR);
- Braikenridge collection of prints and watercolours;
- Grimm collection – wash drawings made 1784-1790, landscape and topographic;
- Pigott collection – 1,154 black & white wash drawings of ecclesiastical and domestic architecture;
- Philip Rahtz slide collection (several thousand 35 mm slides of archaeological interest), and the Rahtz bequest of 58 volumes of publications (his own and others'), typescripts and ephemera;
- Roland Paul collection – topographical and heraldic drawings.



Another of the rarer items - "The road from Bristol to Exeter" – in A pocket-guide to the English traveller, being a compleat survey and measurement of all the principal roads and most considerable cross-roads in England and Wales by John Ogilby, contains 100 illustrations, mostly maps [dated 1740 – 1775]. Easily portable directions for a journey – a kind of 18th century satnav.

Access

Recent additions to the Library, and current issues of journals, are on open access in the public Searchroom at SHC. However, the terms of SANHS' Library Collection Agreement with Somerset Council (and previously Somerset County Council) mean that SANHS members are not permitted to browse the strongroom ("stack") where most of our collections are held. Security in the Strongroom must reflect the most vulnerable items in the shared space. We acknowledge that this is seen by members as an obstacle to research, but it is not insuperable.

SANHS members may borrow books (not journals); and anyone can consult our books, journals and other materials at SHC (where there is free parking!) Public hours are 10 till 4, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays; staff will give every assistance. Prior booking is not needed, but is advised, and can save time. Access to the SHC Searchroom is explained in detail on their website – search for swheritage.org.uk/somerset-archives/visit/ You can also telephone 01823 278805 to book a visit.

Archive collection

SANHS became a collector of archives and manuscripts soon after its creation in 1849, partly in response to its wish to gather materials for a large-scale history of the county.

Early acquisitions included a reputed charter of King Ine, dated AD 705, and large quantities of material evidently rescued from the Diocesan Registry at Wells. By the 1930s, the vigilance of antiquarians such as Thomas Serel of Wells and Charles Tite of Taunton, together with the gifts and loans of many organisations and individuals, had resulted in a collection outstanding in its richness and diversity. It was transferred to the Somerset Record Office from 1935 onwards, is now housed at SHC, and remains perhaps the most important non-official collection of Somerset archives in existence.

Researchers should seek assistance and advice from archivists of SHC. Public access is as for Library, above.

SANHS online

SANHS has recently started to make video clips of interesting items in its collections; the first set of these covers the Library. They illustrate a few of SANHS' treasures, and can be seen on YouTube, on SANHS' own channel. Some of SANHS' recent webinars can also be viewed there.

Sue Goodman, Hon Deputy Librarian

See next article for further details of SANHS YouTube.

The SANHS Webinars and Collection Series

Lizzie Induni, our Chair, is the driving force behind the SANHS webinars. Here she highlights the critical work of other members who ensure the technology provides a seamless experience for the audience.

If you watch one of the SANHS webinars you usually only see myself and the speakers. But behind the scenes the really clever work is being done; Nathanael Williams, Tony Harding and Allan Induni spend a considerable amount of time producing our webinars to a really high standard, checking that the viewers see an effortless and entertaining film, without any glitches. Of course, the webinars are not just for our members, but also for people all over the world.

Webinars in 2023:

			YouTube
12th Jan.	A Landscape with Chapels	David Dawson	Yes
26th Jan.	The Twin Manors of Preston Bowyer	David Victor	Yes
8th Feb.	Shetland Wildlife	Matt Eade	Yes
8th Mar.	A Trip to Steep Holm	Steve Parker	Yes
24th Oct.	Putting Metalwork in its Place	Matthew Knight	Yes
30th Nov.	Tone Works, Wellington	Joanne O'Hara	No

As well as running our monthly webinars, the Webinar team have also been producing a set of films to help SANHS members access our extensive collections. We started this project by filming the SANHS library, which is stored at the Somerset Heritage Centre. The aim over the next few years is to make other small films to show all our collections including the archives and museum. They are called the SANHS Collections and to watch these and our webinars just go to:

https://www.youtube.com/@SANHS

There is also a link via the SANHS website.

Current films:

Introduction to the Local Studies Library	Kate Parr
Inside the Strong Room	Sue Goodman and Kate Parr
The Tyndale Bible	Kate Parr and David Bromwich
The Braikenridge Collection	David Bromwich
Collections of Illustrations	David Bromwich
Pocket Guide for the English Traveller	David Bromwich
The Charles Tite Collection	David Bromwich
Freshwater Fishes of Great Britain	Kate Parr

A Trip to Shetland with Naturetrek Guide Matt Eade

Shetland is about as far away from Somerset as is possible whilst remaining in Great Britain. Matt Eade gave us an insight into the prolific and sometimes unusual wildlife to be found there. Don't forget, if you have on-line access, do watch it again or perhaps visit yourself. In addition to the wildlife, there is plenty of archaeology to be found.

On the 8th February we were treated to a very interesting and well-illustrated webinar on the Shetland Isles by Matt Eade who took us on an early summer trip from Sumburgh Head at the southern end of the archipelago to Muckle Flugga, at the northernmost tip of the islands. In between we were shown the abundance of wildlife that lives on these virtually treeless islands. These islands are known for the very large summer colonies of sea birds: Guillemots, *Uria aalge,* Razorbills, *Alca torda* and Kittiwakes, *Rissa tridactyla,* that nest on the precipitous cliffs with Puffins, *Fratercula artica* nesting in burrows at the top of the cliffs. Sumburgh Head nature reserve is an ideal spot to see these birds flying to and from their nesting ledges, Fulmars, *Fulmaris glacialis,* gliding effortlessly around the cliffs and with the Puffins just over the low wall on the cliff top. This is also an excellent spot to look for cetaceans such as dolphins, Orcas, *Orcinus orca,* and Minke Whales, *Balaenoptera acutorostrata,* being amongst the 10 species of cetaceans that have been recorded from the islands.

Puffin *Fratercula artica*. Photo: Matt Eade

Away from the sea, some of Britain's rarer breeding birds are to be found in the lochs and lochans scattered about the Mainland, as the largest island is known, and these include the Red-necked Phalarope, *Phalaropus lobatus,* and Red-throated Diver, *Gavia stellata*. The Red-necked Phalarope is unusual in that it is the male bird with its less bright plumage that incubates the eggs and tends the young birds until they fly. Amazingly these waders have been found to winter on the Eastern Pacific coast of Ecuador. Also away from the sea and nesting in burrows and crevices of stone walls and scree is the Storm Petrel, *Hydrobates pelagicus,* Britain's

smallest sea bird, with its most spectacular site being on the island of Mousa within the Broch of Mousa, a 2,500yr old, 40 ft high, drystone tower with crevices between the stones providing nesting sites for several hundred pairs of petrels. It is amazing the birds find the right nesting crevice as they only come to land at night, the darker the better, as they are preyed upon by the larger gulls.

Making use of any undisturbed and suitable beach or accessible rocks are the Common (Harbour), *Phoca vitulina,* and Grey Atlantic, *Halichoreus griseus,* seals, which are the largest of the two species and it is size which is the easiest distinguishing feature when they are on land, the Common seal approx. 1m. in length, the Grey up to 2.5m. Heads bobbing in the sea pose a problem!

As the talk journeyed north up the Mainland we saw the magnificent volcanic cliffs and scenery of Eshaness, passing one of the small herds of the hardy Shetland ponies that are scattered about the Mainland, on the way. The North Isles of Yell, Unst and Fetlar are rich in breeding waders and serviced by efficient inter-island ferries allowing easy access to the most northerly island Unst, after having crossed Yell with its large Otter, *Lutra lutra,* population where individuals might be seen feeding amongst the kelp and rocks along the shore. It was on the adjacent island, Fetlar, that in the late 1960's Snowy Owls, *Bubo scandiacus,* bred for the first time in Britain and although none have done so since the mid-1970's Matt showed a recent photo of one there, an optimistic sign.

Crossing from Yell to Unst, a walk to the tip of the island through Hermaness National Nature Reserve to the high sea cliffs gives breathtaking views overlooking the most northerly lighthouse in Britain on Muckle Flugga. The lighthouse, although so isolated, is surrounded by wheeling Gannets, *Morus bassanus,* which nest on the adjacent rocky stacks whilst the cliff tops and slopes are the home to numerous Puffins, (25,000 pairs estimated). The open moorland walk passes through the territories of Whimbrel, *Numenius phaeopus,* and Great Skuas, *Stercorarius skua,* the Whimbrels with their bubbling call reminiscent of Curlews, *Numenius arquata,* pose no problem. The Great Skuas, however, can take exception if too close to their nest or young and will drive away intruders with their loud calling and dive-bombing technique.

Although so far north, there are still about 400 plant species recorded for Shetland including the rare Oysterplant, *Mertensia maritima* and Matt concluded his very interesting talk with some botanical photos including one plant endemic to Shetland and only found on Unst, Edmonston's Chickweed, *Cerastium nigrescens,* (Shetland Mouse-ear). This plant together with Lesser Twayblade, *Listera cordata,* and Frog Orchid, *Coeloglossum viride* can be found on Unst growing low down out of the wind and adding to Unst's wildlife interest.

David Reid

SANHS Grants

SANHS manages a number of funds to support activities relating to the historic County of Somerset. These are:

Pat Hill–Cottingham Memorial Fund

Scope: Research in natural sciences (geology, botany, zoology, mycology, ecology etc.)

Example: 'Support to the Steep Holm surveys' in this issue of SANHS News

Maltwood Fund

Scope: Research in archaeology & history

Examples: 'Sigwells', 'Godney Canoe' & 'Backwell' in this issue of SANHS News

Gray Fund

Scope: Public engagement in archaeology & history

Example: Support to 'Storage of Small Finds', 'MAYA' and 'James Date exhibition' in this issue of SANHS News

Desmond Williams Fund

Scope: In support Publication of papers on vernacular architecture

Murless Fund

Scope: Public engagement and education resulting from the preparation of heritage items for display

Example: Digitization of historic local photographs in the care of the Clifton Suspension Bridge Trust – SANHS News 2019

SANHS welcomes applications for specific defined projects from individuals or from individuals on behalf of local groups or institutions. For further details see the SANHS website or contact the Office Manager.

Steep Holm, an Island in the Bristol Channel

Steve Parker, our president, gave a Webinar describing on-going work of conservation and recording. Although only in the Bristol Channel - so much closer than Shetland - you won't find public scheduled services to take you to Steep Holm!

Seen by anyone from the Somerset coast looking around the Severn estuary the island of Steep Holm was the subject of a very interesting talk given by Steve Parker to a large webinar audience.

This island, which is roughly mid-way between the Somerset and Welsh coasts and some 5 miles from Weston-super-Mare, is within Somerset and administered by the Kenneth Allsop Memorial Trust. It is approximately 50 acres in extent which increases by 15 or so acres at low tide, and at its highest point of 256ft, has a trig point. Now being maintained as a nature reserve, it was once farmed and has, by the landing quay, the remains of an old inn. Going further back in time, the long history of excavations is revealing what was possibly a Roman signal station and an old priory.

Your transport for Steep Holm. **Photo: Steve Parker**

During the 1860's it was fortified as part of Lord Palmerston's defences against a possible French invasion with several muzzle loading gun emplacements, underground munition stores, and 7 ton guns - some of which are still present. The large Barrack building, which, with its small museum, is now used as the island's visitor centre, was built in 1867 together with a large underground reservoir for rainwater collected from the Barrack's roof to supply the garrison's needs. These defences were never used until, in 1898 HMS Argonaut bombarded a battery to test the effectiveness of a metal shield for the gun position which proved to be ineffective. This gun battery site is now a Scheduled Monument. During the second world war the island was re-fortified with modern armaments and searchlight batteries to help protect the Severn estuary from any enemy action. The reservoir is now not used for a drinking water supply and as the small well above the East Landing would not be sufficient, all drinking water is now brought to the island.

During the spring/early summer the island is used by large numbers of Herring Gulls, *Larus argentantus,* smaller numbers of Lesser Black-backed Gulls, *Larus fuscus,* and occasional pairs of Greater Black-backed Gulls, *Larus marinus,* for nesting on. Straying too close to a nest on one of the paths or across the summit of the island tends to provoke an aggressive response by the gulls, which in addition to their raucous calls, can involve dive-bombing the intruder. The difficulty for these birds nesting on Steep Holm is that all food for their young has to be foraged for and brought from the mainland. Confined to the north side cliffs is a large Cormorant, *Phalocrocorax carbo,* colony, the nesting birds of which can be occasionally be seen from the 208 steps whilst Ravens, *Corvus corax,* and perhaps Peregrines, *Falco perigrinus,* may be seen over the island. Infrequent visitors to the rocky shoreline are Oystercatchers, *Haemotopus ostralegus.*

The botany of the island is interesting with Alexanders, *Smyrnium olusatrum,* which now occur across the island, recorded in 1562 - a possible Roman introduction, whilst the Wild Leek, *Allium ampeloprasum,* was recorded in 1586. Other unusual flowering plants are present including the Wild Peony, *Paeonia mascula,* Henbane, *Hyoscyamus niger,* Deadly Nightshade, *Atropa belladona,* and a Strawberry Tree, *Arbutus unedo,* which was planted in the 1970's.

There are a number of surveys, supported by SANHS through the Pat Hill-Cottingham Fund, which are recording various wildlife groups occurring on the island including lichens, invertebrates, botany, reptiles and vertebrates to provide a contemporary listing of the flora and fauna of the island. Muntjac Deer, *Muntiacus reevesi,* are present but no mice or rats. Amongst the more interesting invertebrates are the Stilleto Fly, *Theridae,* Yellow-legged Mining Bee, *Andrena flavipes* and, underground in the old magazines, the large but harmless Culvert Spiders, *Araneae,* whose egg cases can be seen hanging from the ceilings.

Visiting arrangements to the island and much other information concerning the island is on the island's website **https://www.steepholm.online** where dates and sailing times are to be found.

David Reid

Sigwells Moulds, Maltwood Fund: Grant 3-2022

Work supported by the SANHS Maltwood Fund

From February–March 2023, Dr Matthew Knight (National Museums Scotland) undertook a 5-day assessment of the Late Bronze Age metalworking assemblage from Sigwells, Somerset, with a view to refining existing datasets and formulating a plan for future work for a full analysis of this important assemblage. The assemblage includes more than 1100 fragments of ceramic moulds and refractories (e.g. crucibles) associated with settlement activity, as well as a variety of stone

tools, such as pounders, grinders and querns. The present work has correlated bagged finds with past work, as well as verifying the accuracy of previous spreadsheets. Further, about half of the refractory fragments have been individually weighed and bagged and all diagnostic pieces have been studied. Some fragments previously considered undiagnostic have been identified as specific parts of metalworking moulds and this raises the possibility that full assessment of the undiagnostic material may reveal further diagnostic elements.

Fragment of copper in sherd of Bronze Age mould from Sigwells Photo: Matthew Knight

In sum, the collection of metalworking refractories includes mould gates and runners, wraps for moulds and possible crucibles as well as matrices for a range of Late Bronze Age metal objects, including swords, chapes, pins and socketed axeheads. It represents a significant and diverse assemblage of material, especially in light of the relatively limited range of Late Bronze Age metalwork recovered from Somerset around the same time and a growing number of metalworking assemblages discovered in the region. The stone tools appear predominantly to relate to other domestic or craft activities, but additional work may demonstrate otherwise.

Proposed future work will consider refining details of the individual object matrices and minimum numbers of objects produced; the number and chronology of metalworking events; compositional analyses of moulds and ceramic fabrics through x-ray fluorescence; and a wider discussion of the Sigwells metalworking assemblage in its wider context. One stand-out next step is analysis of a small copper-alloy droplet embedded in a mould fragment.

The project is grateful for financial support from the Society's Maltwood Fund.

Matthew Knight, National Museums Scotland
7/03/2023

The Godney Canoe – the only known Anglo Saxon log boat in Somerset

Another project where dating was facilitated through the support of the Maltwood Fund. Modern technology applied to a nineteenth century find. A local museum surely worth a visit.

This dug-out canoe was found 100 yards from Glastonbury Lake Village in 1892. It was discovered during ditching work, as one end of the canoe projected out into the ditch. The boat was found four feet below the level of the ground surface within the field and the two feet above the canoe were 'solid peat' ('The Graphic' magazine, 5 Nov. 1892, p.545). Due to its find location, it has always been assumed that it was connected to the Lake Village, or at least to that period of time, although it had never been scientifically dated. Apart from a few references in general publications on the Somerset Levels, it had not been studied nor reported in the literature.

The canoe has been in the care of Glastonbury Antiquarian Society for over a century. In 2022, the Society agreed that dating the boat would provide an historical context for the artefact and enhance public understanding of its significance, especially given the importance of the existing Lake Village display in the Tribunal, which was being revamped and reopened by the Society as Glastonbury Museum.

Early photograph of the canoe

The canoe was examined and recorded by Richard Brunning of the South West Heritage Trust for the Glastonbury Antiquarian Society and was sampled for radiocarbon dating from an area of surviving sapwood and therefore relates to roughly 10 years before the felling of the tree and the construction of the canoe. The date was 674-748 cal AD (47.9%), 758-779 cal AD (5.5%) or 785-878 cal AD (42.1%) (SUERC – 106018, 1244+/-24 BP), so most likely to be early 700's or early 800's AD. The dating was supported by a grant from the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society Maltwood fund. It was carried out by Scottish Universities Environmental Research Centre in Glasgow in September 2022.

The craft is in a partial state of preservation, although the surviving elements represent virtually the entire original length and the original breadth over two-thirds of the vessel. The sides are complete in places so the original depth of the craft can also be gauged. Its length is 5m, it is 600mm wide and the original external height of the sides was probably about 300mm. Bulleid records that it was 18 foot long 'when complete' (Bulleid 1906, 52) which suggests that a section is missing from the damaged end, though The Graphic magazine recorded a length of 17 feet in 1892.

The Godney Canoe in Glastonbury Tribunal **Photo: Mary Claridge**

The canoe is flat bottomed and curves up towards the prow and stern over the last metre at either end. Both ends are carefully tapered towards a slim point suggesting that the canoe was double ended. That would be an advantage in narrow channels, where a change of direction could be achieved without the need to turn the vessel around. It was made from a mature oak tree, over 150 years old. The base of the tree was at the incomplete end of the canoe as demonstrated in the direction of the side branches. The numerous and large side branches suggest that the tree was not growing in dense woodland, but instead in an environment where it branched early and often. That could be in a hedgerow, as a standard in a coppiced woodland or as an isolated tree within a pasture or arable field.

The large number of branches on the tree trunk selected by the builders had several disadvantages. They would make it a lot harder to cut out the desired shape of the vessel and get a smooth finish. In addition, they create areas of weakness where the side branch wood could split or even pop out, especially in the very thin sides. Many of the knots now appear as holes in the sides for that reason.

Four other dug-out canoes are known to have been discovered in the Brue Valley (Bulleid 1906, Gray 1946, Stradling 1849) and two more from Kings Sedgemoor, south of the Polden hills. The Godney Canoe is one of just two that survive in Somerset and is the only known Anglo-Saxon log boat in the county. It is currently on display in the Glastonbury Tribunal, home to the Glastonbury Museum (closed in the winter). A full article describing the canoe, written by Richard Brunning, can be found on the Society's website: https://www.glastonburyantiquarians.org/site/

Mary Claridge

With grateful acknowledgement to Richard Brunning, SWHT

References:

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Gray, H. St. G. 1946. Remains of a boat, Meare. Proc. Somerset Arch. Nat. Hist. Soc., 92, 102

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Update on Backwell
'Human remains from Backwell Cave, North Somerset'

Backwell Cave in North Somerset may be small, but it is mighty in archaeological significance. In 1937, excavations led by the University of Bristol Spelaeological Society (UBSS) revealed a substantial comingled corpus of prehistoric human remains buried mysteriously within Backwell Cave. The cave was described as being too small for even a single person to live in (Tratman and Jackson 1938: 65), making the interment of at least 18 individuals all the more puzzling. Adding to the confusion is the distribution of demography: both males and females are represented, with ages spanning from children to mature adults. Clearly, this was an important site specially selected as an arena for human burial, but that's where our current understanding ends. The disarticulated nature of the deposit, along with the tangled chronological sequence of use of the cave from the Neolithic to Iron Age, limits modern interpretation.

In 2020, the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society generously granted funds to produce two new radiocarbon dates from human remains recovered from Backwell Cave, curated at the University of Bristol Spelaeological Society Museum. One sample failed to produce a radiocarbon date due to poor preservation, but the other produced a date range of 3760-3540 BC (UBA-43872). Interestingly, a date obtained by a previous study (Ambers and Bowman 2003) produced a later range of AD 3370-3040 (BM-3099). This suggests the site was likely used as an ossuary over centuries during the Neolithic period, though the presence of later Iron Age and Roman material amongst the assemblage described by Tratman (1938) tantalisingly hints at an even longer tradition of use.

The sampling of an alternative bone to the one that failed to produce a radiocarbon date was thwarted by a series of unfortunate events: hazardous structural conditions and a pandemic meant the collections housed in the UBSS museum could not be safely visited until this January. However, we are thrilled to report the second element has at long last been sampled and is currently undergoing analysis at CHRONO 14 Lab at Queen's University Belfast. We are so excited to see if this date fits within the broad Neolithic temporal framework, or throws a curveball– whatever the result, it will bring us that much closer to unravelling the story of Backwell Cave.

Adelle Bricking

Reference:

Tratman, E.K. and Jackson, J.W. 1938. The Excavation of Backwell Cave. *Proceedings University of Bristol Spelaeological Society* 5(1), 57-74.

Improving the Storage of Archaeological Small Finds

Our project aimed to improve the accessibility of archaeological small finds in the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society (SANHS) and Somerset Council (SC) museum collections at the Somerset Heritage Centre. This was achieved by using a grant from the Gray Fund to purchase a specialist storage cabinet made of conservation grade materials in which to house the Somerset Pottery Fabric Type Series (SPFTS).

We purchased a metal cabinet from Bisley. As the SPFTS was created each group of sherds was placed into one of the drawers in the cabinet. Each individual sherd was placed into its own cardboard tray within the drawer, labelled with its unique identifying numbers.

The cabinet is on castors which means it can easily be wheeled from the stores to the Research Room, where it can be consulted by visiting researchers. Researchers can easily look through the drawers in the cabinets as part of the process of identifying their own pottery sherds.

SPFTS Cabinet – Medieval and 16th century wares
Photo: Amal Khreisheh

In this way our project has contributed to the overarching aim of the SANHS Heritage Grant Scheme to support research and improve public access to the archaeology of the historic county of Somerset for the benefit of the education of the public.

Amal Khreisheh

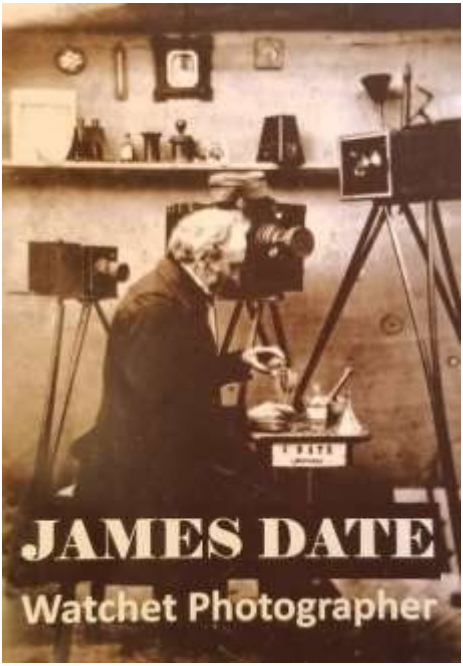
MAYA – Trip to Caerleon

A grant from the Gray Fund enabled Mick Aston's Young Archaeologists (MAYA) to visit Caerleon. See article on MAYA on p.32 in this SANHS News.

James Date (1807-1895), Watchet's Pioneering Photographer

The preparation of some of the material for an exhibition held in Watchet about local photographer, James Date, was supported by the Society's Gray Fund. Here, Chris Jessop, who was herself involved, reports on the event.

In excess of a thousand visitors were able to experience what Watchet and some of the surrounding areas looked like between the late 1850s and 1877 at an exhibition of James Date photographs in the Lynda Cotton Gallery in Watchet in October 2022. It was opened by James's great-great grandson, and provided an unexpected level of family archives for the exhibition.



Cover of exhibition commemorative booklet Photo: Lizzie Induni

The exhibition was the result of collaboration between the Watchet Market House Museum, Watchet Conservation Society and Nick Cotton of the Lynda Cotton Gallery. Nick removed a considerable amount of his antique furniture from the gallery to give adequate space for the display.

Other work carried out by local historians was on view to give an all-round understanding of James as a man as well as his achievements. His photographs covered a period of great development in Watchet when the railway arrived, the lighthouse was erected, and the mineral railway workings started. All five rooms of the gallery were utilised, the main rooms housing the many images (some enlarged to A1 or A2 size), a loaned copy of the first edition of the West Somerset Free Press of 1860 which included an advert for the opening of James's studio in Dunster, and a photo of the Trustees, of which James was one, at the opening of the newly built Methodist Church. Also loaned were the original vellum deeds of the building, which had James's signature.

One room was fitted out as it would have been in the Victorian times with family photographs and portraits, also indicating James's fascination with geology. The extensive family history of the Dates in Victorian times, compiled by Jane Sharp, was available to peruse, there was information from Chris Saunders, railway historian, from Dave Evans on the geological aspects, and an article by Naomi Cudmore on James Date written almost twenty years ago. This room had a homely feel and the comfort of a spoon-back chair resulted in one visitor falling asleep! The final room was to do with the Mineral Railway, which James had photographed on many occasions. This contained many models and general ephemera loaned by the Mineral Railway Association.

The exhibition was stewarded by local volunteers from the involved societies, and I did some sessions. A free 16-page booklet was produced about the exhibition [we have a copy in SANHS library] and recipients were encouraged to make a donation

to the museum, resulting in approximately £1,000 being raised. Two hundred booklets were originally printed but a further one hundred had to be ordered towards the end of the first week.

Several stereoscopes were available along with many prints to be viewed, one local resident heard about the exhibition and brought along more images which he kindly donated. Nick has a collection of his own, but many more were loaned. These really interested the younger generation along with the many photographs on display. Running alongside was an audio-visual description of the stereoscopes which James had introduced to the Watchet people. This featured Paul Upton, co-curator, with a supporting cast including Brian May of the great group Queen who has had a long interest in stereoscopy.

A successful application to the heritage grants committee of SANHS resulted in more of the images being enlarged; these are now with the Market House Museum as an ongoing collection for future use. Chris Jessop

SANHS visit to Dunkeswell aerodrome.

The Historic Buildings Committee arranged several visits during 2023. Here Lizzie Induni reports on one on 8th July 2023.

Delegates from the far reaches of the county of Somerset came to Dunkeswell Aerodrome to learn about the heritage of the airfield. We started the tour in the heritage centre and were given a short talk and a film, which of course included Pathe News clips.

Delegates at the exhibition in the heritage centre Photo: Lizzie Induni

After the museum we paid a visit the airfield. Delegates travelled in their own cars and were each given a walkie-talkie. Our tour guide, Brian, was able to talk us through the sites whist we stayed in our cars. This was advantageous as it rained quite heavily.

Corrugated iron Nissen hut at Dunkeswell, typical of many that were used during WW2. Photo: Lizzie Induni

Despite the rain we had an excellent day and Chris Chanter brought along his new puppy which was extremely entertaining.

Delegates with Chris Chanter's puppy, Pango, at the end of one of the runways Photo: Lizzie Induni

Latest from the Early Dunster Project

The group held a highly successful and well attended public event based at the Tithe Barn, Dunster, on 4/6/23 with talks, exhibitions and walkabouts. The project is moving towards a successful conclusion, but much work continues. Here Mary Ewing reports on some of the more recent findings.

The group has been very fortunate to record five of the earliest large properties in Dunster, which have all proved to be extremely interesting. The latest of these is the "Luttrell Arms" which is still being worked on.

The first of the buildings was the Castle Gatehouse and Gateway (Richardson; SANHS vol.164). Unfortunately, dendro-dating of the gates was not possible, but they are believed by the Castles Research Group to be fourteenth century. In 1417, the doors were repaired as recorded by the historian Maxwell Lyte, and the heavy horizontal bars, wicker gate and ironmongery are all recorded as part of the repairs. Amongst the ironwork was a very heavy door knocker (weighing 104lbs.) which fascinated volunteers and visitors alike.

Castle gates

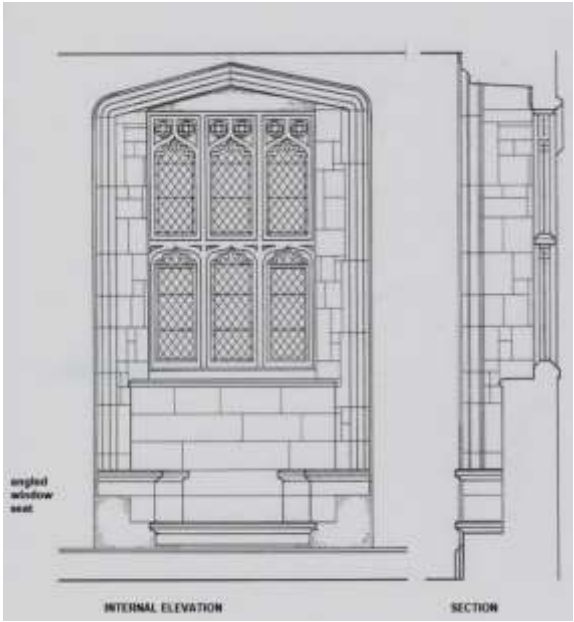
Entrance door to the Old Manor, Lower Marsh

A rather similar but much smaller version of this door knocker was also noticed on the early entrance door at the Old Manor, Lower Marsh. It is hoped to publish a detailed article on this property as it a remarkably restored and well-preserved early 15th century house with wings of two storeys at each end.

The circular stairs at one end are particularly atmospheric. Among other features, the house has a first-floor chapel with a fine wagon roof with carved bosses. It stands on what would have been the route to the once important harbour at Dunster.

Chapel ceiling at Lower Marsh

Stone stairs at Lower Marsh



Window at Castle Gatehouse

The gatehouse, judging by former window size originally had a more defensive nature, but new windows inserted around 1500 A.D. may be coeval with later work to the six lodgings inside the building.

Each of these lodgings had a fireplace, a garderobe and an individual entrance via the spiral stairs at each end of the building.

Lodgings of this type may also have been the origin of the building at 4,6,& 8 Church Street, formerly known as the "Nunnery". Here, the spiral staircases are of solid baulks of timber rather than stone and with the newel formed at the end of each tread. The staircases rose at the back of the building providing possible separate access again to each unit. Traces of garderobes here still exist and the likely original medieval windows are plain rectangles to the north whereas the east gable has stone traceried windows.

Main roof range at Lower Marsh

The oldest roof recorded belongs to the Old Priory west wing and has been dendro-dated to the very early C14th. Although much repaired, this, together with other records in Dunster, is proving to be extremely useful in studying late medieval carpentry. The south wing of the Old Priory is considerably later at the second half of the C15th. In the parlour is a fine fireplace with built in seat and a window that looks very similar to the lower half of the windows at the gatehouse, considered by Stuart Blaylock to be of around 1500. It seems likely that this window originally extended upwards to light the former open Hall, and that other windows, some with reveals suggested in the stonework were of similar pattern.

False hammer beam roof at Luttrell Arms with cusped windbracing

The roofs in all except the Nunnery were originally open to the room below and are splendid, perhaps the finest now seen at the Luttrell Arms with the Lower Marsh arch braced roofs being the runners up!

Work is still in progress on writing up reports and some more surveys of later houses in Dunster will be undertaken. All work is throwing up more questions and providing fascinating subject matter for discussions and publication.

Text Mary Ewing, drawings by Meryl Dowling, photos by Tony Harding and the Early Dunster Group.

Heraldry – an Introduction

The Local History Committee arranged a full programme of talks in 2023. Here, Mary Siraut describes one of the more unusual - which concluded, as usual, with many questions and much discussion.

Fifteen people gathered on 22 March for an excellent and enjoyable introduction to heraldry by Des Atkinson. He introduced us to the parts of the heraldic achievement using the example of the arms of Somerset County Council before outlining the origins of heralds and heraldry.

Heralds were found in the courts of ancient Greece and Egypt. The real flowering of heralds and heraldry probably arose from the arrangement of tournaments. These started in France in the late 11th century but by the mid 12th century were held throughout Europe. The participants were eager to show off their elaborate dress and armour with a colourful display of their coat of arms and crests such as that shown in the portrayal of Sir Geoffrey Luttrell in the Luttrell psalter. Success in the lists could lead to a brilliant court career.

From a romance of Henry, Count of Anhalt from the Codex Manasse

From the Luttrell Psalter

Arms began to be displayed on document seals throughout Europe as they became more widely known and recognised as belonging to a specific individual. Coats of arms came to be regarded as family property as outlined by Italian jurist Bartolo de Sassoferrato resulting in bodies to uphold rights to arms. Des introduced us to the Court of Chivalry and the College of Arms with its 3 Kings of Arms, 6 Heralds and 4 Pursuivants, originating as Royal and aristocratic heralds, hence the names they still bear. The college was formally established in 1484, so does not have jurisdiction in Scotland but there is a King of Arms for Ulster. Their salaries were fixed by James I but today they also earn substantial fees. The college, now open to women, has been based in the City of London since 1565 and managed to save its precious archive from the Great Fire.

College of Arms

Increasingly corporate bodies have acquired coats of arms. In the Middle Ages religious houses like Glastonbury adopted heraldry, especially important for those bishops and mitred abbots who sat in the House of Lords. The Archbishop of Canterbury still has on his coat the papal pallium with its cross pins. Bishops and abbots used personal arms but sometimes also a rebus, a device playing on the name such as a flaming beacon on a tun (a large barrel) for Bishop Beckington.

Arms of the Archdiocese of Canterbury

Des outlined the system of visitations from 1530 when heralds travelled the country checking on the use of arms and disclaiming the use of coats of arms by those not entitled to them. The records of these visitations include pedigrees and drawings and often refer to stained glass and monuments in churches seen by the heralds but destroyed in the Civil War and its aftermath.

Such importance was attached to these visitations that many duplicate copies of records were made and are found in the British Library and elsewhere as well as at the College of Arms. Many of these records have been printed and Des concentrated on the 1623 visitation of Somerset, whose anniversary he was marking. The heralds stayed in town inns around the county including the Three Cups in Taunton. They copied the extremely long pedigree of the Stowells of Cothelstone but found two men from Bishops Lydeard unworthy to bear arms.

The talk was followed by an interesting discussion about heraldry old and new the connection with logos and whether anyone who can afford a coat of arms can have one! Many thanks to Des for a fascinating evening.

Mary Siraut

New Frome Hoard Display at Frome Museum

Another candidate for a visit; do support our local museums if you get the opportunity. Here Tesni Daniel reports on a new display at Frome Museum.

Frome Museum reopens on 12th March 2024 with a brand new display about THE FROME HOARD, the **largest deposit of Roman coins** ever found in a single container in the UK. It was discovered by amateur metal detectorist David Crisp on 11th April 2010, and contained a staggering **52,503 coins**. The urn was too thin ever to have been moved, and it is believed it was filled over a fairly short period by people bringing large numbers of coins in their own containers.

The most important coins are the 850 that bear the head of the rogue Emperor Carausius, who in 286 CE rebelled against Rome, declaring himself Imperator Britanniarum - Emperor of Britain and Northern Gaul. Carausius held power for seven years before he was assassinated on the orders of the Roman Emperor Maximilian, so these coins accurately date the burial to sometime after 293 AD. Carausius's assassination would have caused panic amongst the population, and this may explain why so many coins were buried in the hoard.

The Frome Museum display features an exact replica of the original urn*, made by heritage potter Graham Taylor, along with replicas of a selection of the coins aged to reproduce how the hoard would have appeared when first excavated. The display panel that accompanies it gives a comprehensive understanding of the hoard, accessible to visitors of all ages.

*The actual Frome Hoard Urn is kept in the museum of Somerset in Taunton

The museum website is frome-museum.org.

The opening times from 12 March are:
Tuesdays to Saturdays 10am-2pm
Frome Independent Market Sundays 10am-2pm

Text Tesni Daneil; photos © Somerset Council and SWHT

SANHS Artefacts and Schools

In the first of two articles focusing on young people, Amal Khreisheh (Curator of Archaeology at South West Heritage Trust) describes:

'How the SANHS Museum Collection is used by Children through the South West Heritage Trust's Formal Learning Programmes'

Objects from the SANHS museum collection form an integral part of formal learning sessions for children delivered by the South West Heritage Trust. In f.y. 2023-4, 21,426 children from Somerset schools engaged with our curriculum-based learning programmes. Schools can access our learning services by subscribing or on a pay-as-you-go basis. During the last academic year 54 schools took out subscriptions, the maximum number we can accommodate within current capacity.

Museum and In School Workshop Visits

We offer high quality learning experiences aimed at Key Stage One and Key Stage Two children at our museum sites (The Museum of Somerset in Taunton, Somerset Rural Life Museum in Glastonbury and the Somerset Brick and Tile Museum in Bridgwater) and in schools. In 2023-4, we delivered 457 schools' workshops attended by 12,554 children. These support a wide range of curriculum subjects including history, literacy, geography, art and STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics).

A child handling a prehistoric pot at The Museum of Somerset
Photo: Peter Hall, Sep 2019

40 schools' workshop are currently available on topics ranging from Dinosaurs and Fossils to Ancient Egyptians to the Monmouth Rebellion. Schools can also participate in special projects relating to our exhibitions programme.

As part of many workshops, children interact with museum objects from the SANHS collection either by interrogating the gallery displays or by handling particular objects that have been selected for this purpose.

Loans for Learning

Schools are able to borrow real and replica museum objects from the Loans for Learning collection to bring learning to life in the classroom. Learning packs are available themed around 36 different topics spanning history, science and art, geography and culture, and religion. Packs contain a selection of resources, including genuine artefacts, models, printed materials and other useful information for teachers. In 2023-4, 139 schools ordered 252 learning packs and 142 individual objects. The Loans for Learning collection includes objects from the SANHS museum collection, selected for their robustness and ability to inspire and interest children.

Self-Guided Visits

Schools can also make self-guided visits to The Museum of Somerset and Somerset Rural Life Museum. Children can explore the main galleries using one of our self-guided trails. In 2023-4, 3,866 children from Somerset schools made self-guided

Children completing a self-guided trail in the Foundation Stones gallery at The Museum of Somerset
Photo: Peter Hall, Sep 2019

visits. During their visit they will encounter the wide range of SANHS museum objects displayed at the two sites.

Take One

Each year schools are offered the opportunity to take part in the South West Heritage Trust's Take One programme. Take One is a cultural learning programme delivered by regional heritage organisations in partnership with their local schools and communities. It aims to facilitate enquiry-based learning and to inspire imaginative cross-curricular teaching.

Participating primary school teachers and children focus on one object from the collections in the care of the South West Heritage Trust and respond creatively to its subject matter, related themes, historical context or composition. Schools are supported through a CPD (continuing professional development) day for teachers to learn about the object and to develop techniques and ideas for using the object as a resource for curriculum-based learning. The project culminates in an exhibition showcasing the children's responses to the object.

In 2019 the focus of Take One was the Culbone Cist, a Bronze Age burial discovered on Culbone Hill in Exmoor, which forms part of the SANHS museum collection. The cist was discovered on 28 August 1896 by workmen quarrying for road stone. The cist contains a skull, several bones and a beaker (pottery vessel). The Culbone Cist is currently on display in the Claiming the Land gallery at The Museum of Somerset.

Oil paintings of drinking vessels inspired by the Culbone Cist beaker, made by children as part of the Take One project
Photo: Amal Khreisheh, June 2019.

Six schools expressed an interest in taking part and teachers attended a CPD day on 14 February 2019. Presentations were given by three members of South West Heritage Trust staff and two creative practitioners: Chris Jelley (poet technologist) and Richard Tomlinson (photographer and digital image maker).

988 school children took part in the project. An exhibition of their work was held in The Museum of Somerset Learning Room on Friday 21, Saturday 22 and Tuesday 25 June 2019. 212 people visited the exhibition, including 65 children from participating schools. One child commented: 'I liked learning about the Culbone Cist with my class and then being able to make models and write stories. There was a story behind the person in the cist.'

Conclusion

Beyond supporting curriculum-based learning, interacting with museum objects by taking part in formal learning sessions helps children build confidence and cultural capital. We hope that many of the children who visit will return with their families and continue to visit as teenagers and adults.

Amal Khreisheh

Another successful year for MAYA

Another busy year for Mick Aston's Young Archaeologists (MAYA). Chris Jessop provides a summary.

David Dawson with three MAYANs 4/2/23

We still have a waiting list of young people to join but have to keep numbers to match the volunteer leaders available. We do have three young adults who having reached sixteen are now junior helpers; they enjoy the activities and wish to continue and are a valuable asset. One previous member has completed his Archaeology degree and is now fully employed by one of the archaeology companies and comes along to help whenever he is available. Winter months we have indoor meetings in the Museum of Somerset but, in the summer, we are out and about.

MAYA at the Avalon Archaeology Park 1/4/23

Julian Richards came along to demonstrate his indoor test pitting. David Dawson engaged with the group discussing and identifying medieval and post medieval pottery. Amal arranged a visit to the stores at the Somerset Heritage Centre and Richard Brunning organised the opportunity to experience mosaic laying and wood carving at the Avalon Archaeology Park. No fingers or toes were lost!

In May, with the help of a grant from SANHS Gray Fund we took a coach to Caerleon in Wales to see the remains of one of only three Roman barracks left, an amphitheatre, and the open-air baths (now covered).

MAYA at Caerleon Roman Fort 13/5/23

Geophysics at Martock 3/6/23

In June, the group had the opportunity to be involved in some geophysics work that was being carried out in Martock, and later in the year was involved in an actual dig by kind invitation of Dan Broadbent up at Broomfield.

Whilst at the Tile and Brick museum everyone had the opportunity to make their own brick.

August should have been digging in East Lambrook, a week long community event organised by the Time Travellers local history group but due to the poor weather conditions this was cancelled for the day we were going to participate.

In October it was back indoors and learning how to record finds when on an archaeology dig, November was learning about the different forms of pre-historic henges and December was the midwinter Solstice and making their own 'Stonehenge', followed of course by the Christmas party.

MAYA Winter Solstice Event and Christmas Party 2/12/23

The children are so enthusiastic and it would be nice to be able to take all children and not have a waiting list but it is imperative we keep the numbers at a level that enables us to give them a safe but enjoyable experience. As with a lot of societies, the difficulty is recruiting sufficient adults to do so. Our numbers at meetings are 20-25 each month. All adult helpers are DBS checked, paid for by YAC headquarters, some have experience of archaeology but not all.

Chris Jessop. Pictures courtesy MAYA

Recent work on the SANHS/Somerset herbarium

Some members may not be aware of this nationally important collection.

In SANH Vol. 160 (2017) [see McDonnell & Salmon, below] a short account was published about the work being done to curate the collection of pressed plant specimens, or herbarium, housed with other natural history collections at the Somerset Heritage Centre. Since then, the little team of volunteers – members either of SANHS or the Somerset Rare Plants Group (SRPG) – has continued working on the collection, with the recent emphasis being on databasing the existing specimens while also adding new material.

Even dandelions can make for quite pretty herbarium sheets! This one is *Taraxacum sublaeticolor*, a scarce but under-recorded species in the county.

Of the latter, since the beginning of 2019 approximately 1,170 specimens/sheets have been accessioned to the collection. These have included more than 300 sheets donated by the late Liz McDonnell. It was Liz who instigated much of the work that's been done on the herbarium in the last eight years, and it is fitting that it should now hold so many important specimens originally collected by her.

Other additions include nearly 600 Dandelion (Taraxacum) specimens covering more than 150 of the 170-odd species that are known to occur in Somerset – this is surely now one of the most important Taraxacum collections outside London, Edinburgh and Cardiff. There have, in addition, been significant recent donations of specimens belonging to several other 'difficult' groups such as Eyebrights (Euphrasia), Hawkweeds (Hieracium), Willows (Salix), Rock Sea-lavenders (Limonium) and Knotgrasses (Polygonum). Many more are in

the pipeline: for example, we are currently working on about 100 specimens donated by Helena Crouch, the Botanical Society's official recorder in North Somerset.

As the herbarium has expanded, so we have needed more storage space; and we were delighted a few years ago that Keith Gould, SANHS member and skilled cabinet maker, could build some new cupboards for us.

Two sheets of *Chenopodium hybridum* collected by Helena Crouch in Bath. One of only six records of this species in Somerset since the turn of the century.

The herbarium may be less captivating than many of the other collections held for posterity in SANHS' natural history store at the Heritage Centre. Yet it is a treasure trove for anyone interested in the history of the flora of Somerset and the lives of the botanists who have lived and worked here.

Herbarium sheets neatly stacked away in their cupboards. The paler cupboards on left of photo are the ones that were built for us by Keith Gould.

We hope to have an 'open day' sometime soon to bring to light this "forgotten gem of the SANHS collections", as McDonnell & Salmon's 2017 paper described it. SANHS members will be able to see for themselves what we have been doing in the herbarium, and maybe will better appreciate its considerable scientific value.

Simon Leach, Ian Salmon & Jeanne Webb
Photographs courtesy of Simon Leach / SANHS

Further Reading:

Fitzgerald, Rosemary. "The Somerset herbarium." Exmoor, Winter 2018, pp 86-89.

McDonnell, Liz. "Taunton Herbarium – digitisation and other projects." SRPG Newsletter, no.17, 2016, pp 28-29.

McDonnell, Liz & Salmon, Ian. "Recent work on the SANHS Herbarium held at the Somerset Heritage Centre, Taunton." Somerset Archaeology.

Somerset Archaeological & Natural History Society

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