

## OBITUARY: COLIN FRANCIS CLEMENTS (13 JANUARY 1925 – 6 JULY 2018)

In the 1960s and 1970s features of archaeological significance in the Somerset Landscape were under threat: canals and river navigations were being disturbed by drainage schemes, and peat extracted on a commercial scale by the demands of horticulture. In addition, the dramatic advance of the civil engineering construction of the M5 Motorway was scything its way across the county, and urban developments were re-shaping the townscapes. Into these scenes emerged Colin Clements who had connections with the Taunton area, then and in the past, but few knew in any detail about his own past.

He was born in Amoy, China, the son of Austin John Clements and Lillian May Clements (née Heel). His father was with the Chinese Inland Revenue and engaged in missionary work. Colin and his younger sibling, Alan, went to boarding school in China at a very young age but in 1937 their mother brought them home to Taunton where they attended Taunton School.

Those who met Colin would have recognised someone of upright bearing, boundless energy in digging and a bristled moustache, all redolent of military service. Shortly before his eighteenth birthday in 1943, Colin enlisted as a trooper in the 4<sup>th</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> Royal Dragoon Guards. He was trained in secret in Dumfries and Galloway on Sherman amphibious tanks as a wireless operator and a gun loader. His first day of active service was on D Day (6<sup>th</sup> June 1944) on Gold Beach in Normandy, France. Coming under concerted fire the tank was hit twice. Colin described it to a friend and colleague as being like “someone had taken a massive ice cream scoop and removed part of the tank”. After breaking out from the beach, Colin was involved in high intensity warfare. His regiment went on to assist in the liberation of Lille and Brussels and rescue paratroopers at Arnhem. His stay in Germany was brief, travelling on to Palestine in 1946 to contribute to the delivery of the League of Nations Mandate.

After being demobbed, Colin returned to complete his education by reading Philosophy at Birmingham University. His post-graduate years in the 1950s began in Weston-super-Mare where Colin was employed by the Bristol Aeroplane Company's helicopter division which included marine craft and prefabricated housing. Working with marine plywood may have engendered a lifelong interest in woodworking. In Taunton, Colin went on to establish two small businesses: *Crescent Joinery* manufacturing kitchen cabinets and other plastic fabrications and *Crescent Boats Ltd.* building dinghies and boat kits. He joined the Taunton Canoe Club and became a member of the Somerset Inland Waterways Society (SIWS), a branch of the Inland Waterways Association.

As a spokesman for the SIWS, Colin was able to draw attention to the deleterious condition of the Bridgwater & Taunton Canal, a 19th-century waterway that had become abandoned. He was able to promote its potential and his contribution at this time led to the Canal's eventual full restoration, albeit in the early 1990s. On the river Tone, the Somerset River Board, as managers, had acquired statutory powers to demolish half locks and other historic features along the navigation which had started in the late 17th century. A rare survival is a pamphlet of 1966 typed by Colin pleading the case for the competent recording of these prior to destruction. In 1973 SIWS prepared a report on the Westport Canal for its restoration, primarily as a fishery.

Colin became a member of SANHS in 1964 and had a particular interest in Prehistory, hence the appeal of the timber trackways on the Somerset Levels dating to the Neolithic and Late Bronze Age. He was following a long tradition of others such as C.W. Dymond in the 1870s. Nearly a century later the baton had been handed to Dr (later Professor) John M. Coles who brought his students from Cambridge University for set-piece excavations. In an era of Rescue Archaeology Colin thought that considerably more evidence could be recovered by monitoring the peat cutting operations on an all-year-round basis. Certain fundamental questions about trackway construction, their purpose and possible associated local settlements still needed to be addressed. By 1967 he had assembled a group of volunteer fieldworkers, dubbed by him as his ‘web-footed friends’, mainly drawn from the ranks of members of the SANHS Associated Societies. He provided the training, teaching them to distinguish between natural roots and trackways and the technique of using a wooden spatula to deftly flick peat in order to uncover the bark of the timbers.

It was during this period that Colin became acknowledged as a vital facilitator for the fieldwork and limited excavations. Despite his enjoyment of cycling, Colin's diminutive ‘trademark’ was a van, somewhat incongruously painted white, which was usually full of equipment. Most of the contents were devised by Colin himself including a coffer dam to allow access to timbers below the water line in the peat trenches and a primitive coring tool to identify timbers just below ground surface. The most appreciated excavation aids were Colin's self designed, prefabricated shelters, a combination of scaffold poles and canvas or polythene which gave a measure of protection during inclement weather. On the rare occasions the van was emptied, it provided an impromptu taxi service being overloaded with diggers. One item that was mandatory was a small,



*Colin and an assistant labelling a prehistoric timber trackway at the Somerset River Authority, Burtle diggings, 16th August 1971 Photo courtesy Admiral Blake Museum*



*Colin and the late Miss Joan Peden investigating a Romano-British site on the M5 Motorway at Maylands Road, Wellington Without in 1976 Photo courtesy Brian Murless*

brown suitcase containing Colin's sandwiches. It was seasonally invaded by wasps resulting in battles that Colin could never hope to win.

The fieldwork undertaken by Colin's volunteers on Chilton Moor, Shapwick Heath and Westhay Level resulted in a number of new discoveries which influenced the strategy of the university excavations. Colin used his trusty typewriter to create newsletters, *Trackway Topics*, for his team which encouraged light-hearted social interactions. His own experience became academically valued, reflected in the joint authorship of a paper in the *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society*, an address to a conference on Rescue Archaeology and an award of a M. Litt. by the University of Bristol in 1982.

Although it is impossible to attribute any one area of trackways which gave Colin the most satisfaction, his records suggest that it was excavations around Burtle Bridge where the line of the former Glastonbury Canal was being remodelled as part of the Brue Valley Drainage Scheme. His notebooks from 1971 not only indicate his attention to detail but also show that his work was being well regarded by others. A diary section records that when he was excavating, often alone, people would unexpectedly seek him out to view his results and to show their appreciation. One of the tracks, identified as EH (Edington Heath) 111, yielded sherds of what he termed black/buff ware, his nomenclature for a type of Neolithic pottery.

By the end of 1970 the construction of the M5 Motorway was well advanced, crossing the Brue, then the Parrett between Huntspill and Huntworth. An overarching group for archaeology, the M5 Research Committee, had been set up in early 1969 in Bristol but Colin was concerned about three forthcoming contracts affecting Somerset between Huntworth and the Devon county boundary, territory suggested to be devoid of sites and importantly without potential volunteers to monitor the civil engineering progress. He helped to establish a branch of the parent committee (Taunton M5 Committee) comprising of SANHS members and those attending archaeological courses organised by the University of Bristol Extra-Mural Department. By appointing leaders along sections of each of the contracts, new and potentially significant sites of interest were discovered as well as being able to give support to the archaeologists who excavated at select locations along the routes.

Colin had a new tool in his armoury, a mechanical excavator, which he used to good effect removing quantities of overburden and, by contrast, scraping surfaces to a standard that could then be carefully trowelled to reveal more delicate features. At Parker's Field Culvert, North Petherton, in 1975, Colin was able to trace Romano-British ditches and in the following year excavated another Romano-British site at Maylands

Road, Wellington Without, not without some personal danger from the contractor's own heavy plant.

Taunton's heritage had entered a crisis phase by 1970 with increasing destruction of unrecorded archaeological sites resulting from post-war redevelopment. Colin assisted the establishment of the Taunton Research & Excavation Committee (TREC) in 1973. This body consisted of members of the Town Council, SANHS and academics from Bristol and Exeter Universities. The composition evolved, drawing in professional archaeologists from the County and the newly formed Committee for Rescue Archaeology in Avon, Gloucestershire and Somerset. The resulting programme of excavations, published in 1984, illustrates Colin's work on the medieval town defences, St. Margaret's Leper Hospital and burials and structures in the Inner Ward and Outer Bailey of Taunton Castle. One of the skeletons discovered during the conversion of the former Coin Room into the Somerset Local History Library was sampled for radiocarbon dating. The result of AD 860 +/- 70 was significant as it revealed, for the first time, the presence of Anglo Saxons in this area of Taunton.

The construction of the multi-storey car park in Paul Street involved trenches to support the reinforced concrete piles. Overall, the development provided 160 vertical sections which Colin sampled over the course of six weeks. Although technically a salvage excavation, he retrieved a large assemblage of local and imported medieval and post-medieval pottery. When analysed, the sherds illustrated the significance of Taunton as a trading settlement over many centuries.

Colin had established a role as an individual heritage consultant who would be available, often at short notice, to undertake archaeological tasks as the need arose. So in the 1980s a variety of situations occupied his time. These include monitoring pipeline trenches at Blagdon Hill and Staplegrove, reporting on the Blackdown Ironworking Project and the deserted medieval village at Maperton. Taunton was not forgotten and in 1983 he was able to examine evidence for the fish ponds (Vivarium) beneath Vivary Park which date from at least the 13th century.

In August 1996, as an interlude to his archaeological activities, Colin was the principal proponent of an eight-day archaeological tour of Jutland, Denmark for members of SANHS and its Associated Societies. He organised the visit meticulously ensuring a truly memorable experience for the 34 participants with expert lecturers and guides at a variety of venues. The highlight for Colin was that the trip coincided with an International Exhibition of Bog Burials at Silkeborg Museum. The only tinge of disappointment would have been that he had not discovered such a burial in his time on the Somerset Levels.

The 1980s saw the start of a serious interest in wood





*A typical scene of Colin in action with his mechanical excavator removing overburden from the site of the 18th-century Chandos Glass Cone at Bridgwater in 1976. Mr. Frank Hawtin directed the excavation under the auspices of the Somerset Industrial Archaeological Society. Photo courtesy Brian Murless*

carving and his creative skills were recognised by the Somerset Guild of Craftsmen who made him an Honorary Life Member. His exquisitely crafted birds were lauded, and one in particular was the carving of a wren mounted on a block of Somerset bog oak which Colin calculated had survived for over three centuries between 2976 and 2563 BC. He became an active member of the Blackdown Hills Hedge Association where he introduced and taught hedge laying and other related hedgerow crafts as part of a programme of courses. Colin had the use of a workshop on the Hills and also undertook these activities in Moray, Scotland, where he spent part of the year with his friends. One of his best remembered initiatives on the Blackdowns was siting and installing two willow sculptures of leaping Roe deer visible at one of the main roads into the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Colin died in Elgin, Scotland, a month after a regimental reunion in Normandy, but his ashes were reverently brought to Somerset to be scattered at this location.

Any assessment of Colin's contribution to SANHS over 50 years reflects not only skills outdoors as their representative but also his service around the committee table. His patient diplomacy and enthusiasm stemming

from his experiences encouraged a zeal for reform which continued over the years. In 1975, as Chairman of SANHS Archaeological Committee, he was reporting to the Society's Council, the governing body prior to the Board of Trustees, on the programme of progressive recommendations made by L. V. Grinsell for the Society. In 2006, Colin was promoting community archaeology as a way forward by Taunton Deane Archaeological & Research Committee (the successor to TREC) as a means of engaging local people in their heritage. Although developer-led funding and altered planning legislation had brought a more impersonal approach to archaeological investigations, Colin appreciated that charismatic leadership (as he'd always personified) was a vital factor in promoting interest in the past.

#### Acknowledgements

With grateful thanks to Zoe Kent and the Clements Family for generously providing details of Colin's early life and to whom we send our condolences. Many people have kindly commented on the esteem in which they held Colin and his friendship towards them.

On a personal note, Colin was someone who took archaeology off the printed page and created through his fieldwork and excavations rewarding, lifelong experiences giving a sense of fulfilment.

The construction of this obituary has also benefitted from observations by David Bromwich, Geoff Fitton and Chris Webster.

Brian Murless

### Legacy and Sources

With the exception of some fieldwork carried out in Devon, Colin only appears to have directed archaeological work within the boundaries of Somerset. Appropriately the documentary evidence for these has been gathered together for deposit at the Somerset Heritage Centre where it can be consulted by appointment. Below is a first attempt to define the nature and scope of these collections.

#### Somerset Museums Service

These primarily consist of artefacts, transparencies and negatives, field notebooks and some paperwork being conserved and catalogued by the South West Heritage Trust. During 2018, Richard Brunning, Robert Dunning and Chris Webster placed additional material to that already deposited by Colin himself.

#### Somerset Historic Environment Record

References in the Somerset HER will ultimately draw together all Colin's material housed within the Somerset Heritage Centre. It also enables the location of sites through mapping and those parts of his legacy which never reached publication but are important as drafts or stand-alone typescripts such as reports. A number of others are likely to be added to this list over time. The format adopted here is the primary reference number(s) followed by a title and a date to indicate either when it was written by Colin or his presence on site.

- 11952, 10754 *Skinner's Wood trackways, Excavation and recording* (1970-76)  
 44701 *St. Margaret's Leper Hospital, Taunton*. Typescript and map Undated c. 1972.  
 29188 *The Mound, Beckery, Glastonbury*. Watching brief (1972).  
 15071, 12283, 15072 *Castle Green Car Part, Taunton, A Rescue Excavation in January 1973*. Typescript 1973.  
 15610 *An exploratory trench on the line of the proposed A30 West Coker by-pass near Chessels Roman Villa in 1974*. Report 1974.  
 54202 and Whitfield, M., *Maperton DMV: Preliminary*

*Report*. Undated c. 1984.

- 15110, 43516 *Archaeological, Fulwood to Blagdon Hill, duplication main, Pitminster Parish*, Winter 1987. Report 1988.  
 44439, 44794 *Priorswood field survey, 1990-92*. Report 1992.  
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 39353 *Human burials, Gyffarde Street, Taunton*. Section drawing, undated.

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- and Norman, C., 1979. 'Prehistoric Timber Structures on King's Sedgemoor – Some Recent Discoveries', *SANH* 123, 5-18. The originals of the drawings and photographs published as illustrations in the article are in the SANHS collection at E CAB 3 J/1652.
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Colin Clements, a member of the Society since 1964, died in Scotland, where recently he had lived for part of each year, on 6 July 2018, aged 93.

There will be many who remember a hesitant man whose answers to questions were a long time coming, but always serious. Some who worked with him on archaeological sites remember his boundless enthusiasm, but also that it was wise to give him and his mechanical digger a wide berth. Yet no-one would have been in any doubt about his dedication to so many activities – archaeology, hedges, wood carving, cycling and rowing and, towards the end of his life, for visiting Normandy for commemorations of the Invasion,

Colin Francis Clements was born in Amoy, China, in 1925 where his parents were missionaries. His mother brought him and his younger brother, Alan, to Taunton in 1937, leaving their father in China until after the War. Colin attended Taunton School and recalled acting as bugler for members of the Cadet Force detailed to help harvest flax at Jordans, Ilminster. He thought he would rouse his companions more efficiently if he were

to climb one of the trees in the park where they were camping; his fellows were less enthusiastic and removed the ladder, leaving him stranded. Later that same year he was in Wiltshire as a volunteer with the 4<sup>th</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> Dragoon Guards, training to be a wireless operator and gun loader in Sherman tanks, not yet 18.

His experiences in the D-Day landings were shared 60 years later with French school children with a mixture of pride and humility. One memory he shared with me was of being told by his Commanding Officer, the invasion complete and the enemy retreating, to go for a walk in the now eerily silent countryside as his unit paused. He came across an obviously shell-shocked officer and recognised someone in much worse state than himself. Interest in others was one of his great characteristics. His military service took him to Palestine in 1947.

He read Philosophy at Birmingham University (where he also acquired a taste for Jazz) and eventually found employment at the Bristol Aircraft Company's Lockheed plant at Weston-super-Mare. Skills acquired there, especially knowledge of marine ply, came into play in the early 1960s in a business that began at Riverside, Bathpool, as Crescent Boats and became Crescent Joinery in Wilfred Road, Taunton, producing kitchen cabinets and self-build dinghy kits. Working with wood had emerged.

In the 1960s the discovery of prehistoric wooden trackways on the Levels drew Colin to archaeology and he became actively involved from 1967 with work on Chilton Moor, Edington Heath and Burtle Bridge. From there, we worked in Taunton on several rescue excavations and watching briefs, notably the Paul Street site (now the site of the Library and multi-storey car park) and St Margaret's hospital in 1972 (both of which he wrote up for *The Archaeology of Taunton* (pp. 79-82, 124) and in 1974 the Kennedy's Yard and Billet Street sites, where 'the provision and operation of his mechanical excavator' were particularly noted in the report (*ibid.* 83). He was, in consequence, a valued member of the Taunton (later Taunton Deane) Research and Excavation Committee. And as the M5 snaked its way across the county he was much involved in watching archaeological possibilities along its course. His very great knowledge of the Bronze Age trackways was, with great dedication and effort, brought to formality by a thesis for the degree of MA in Archaeology from Bristol University.

When others would have retired, Colin expanded his interests, or rather his love-affair with wood. In the 1980s he took classes in wood carving with Tom Preater and thus began almost a mini-career in carving birds, which brought him to active membership of the Somerset Guild of Craftsmen and sales in outlets in both England and Scotland (one model was purchased by the Prince of Wales for his wife). A passion for

hedgerows and their products drew him to early membership of the Blackdown Hills Hedge Association and the conduct of classes in chair making.

In 2000 Colin met Julie Wheeler and found in her a companion who shared many of his interests and eventually her house in Fochabers, where he spent part of every year. Those who attended his funeral and celebration were given copies of photographs of Colin in Scotland cycling, sailing, building a snowman, even

on a ski-slope (lounging on a sledge), receiving his war medals from the Lord-Lieutenant of Moray, and one, in Normandy in 2016, on the first of three visits to Gold Beach, rather quieter than he remembered. Also among the photographs was a copy of the letter accompanying his award as Chevalier in the Legion d'honneur.

Robert Dunning

### OBITUARY: KENNETH J BARTON (1924-2018)

Kenneth J. Barton died peacefully on 28th August just after his 94th birthday. He had had a distinguished career as a museum curator and director and from 1949 had developed a lifelong passion for archaeology. He will be especially remembered for his work on medieval and later pottery. There are two reasons why he should be commemorated in Somerset: first, for his contribution to our understanding of the archaeology of the county and second, for his generous gift of his collection of vernacular pottery to the people of Somerset.

In 1949 Kenneth started work at the Grosvenor Museum, Chester, and in 1954 took a position at the archaeological conservation laboratory of the Ministry of Works at Lambeth Bridge House. He was appointed Assistant Curator (Technical) at Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery in 1956 with the specific task of setting up and running the conservation laboratory. Part of his job was also 'doing' archaeology. He liked to recall the time he spent with the Axbridge Caving Group and Archaeological Society excavating the Roman villa at Star in 1959-1960. He went on to excavate at Maes Knoll Camp with Philip Rahtz and a nearby rural settlement at Pickwick Farm, Dundry. It was his work in Bristol that laid the foundations of our knowledge of the pottery commonly found in Somerset and some of the primary chronological benchmarks he established by association are relevant today. He may have put the products of the Ham Green pottery slightly later than the 12th-century date established by dendrochronology in 1990, but he defined the distinctive hand-built pottery made there and identified the essential scope of the network across which this ware was traded. His work on French imports, particularly Saintonge ware, inspired by Gerald Dunning's identification of a fine jug from Back Hall, was pioneering: 'I took my Vespa and went to Saintes – such a revelation.' He refined his findings in further excavations elsewhere and in publication. His identification of two of the three kinds of Somerset red earthenwares (though he could not know then that they are of West and East types) sealed by the construction of St Nicholas Almshouses

provides a benchmark of 1652 to 1656, the date of the construction of the building. Further, he published evidence that, in the 18th century, Bristol produced salt-glazed stonewares and the ubiquitous yellow slipwares that are found all over the area. By the time he came to leave for a post in Worthing in 1961, he had radically changed our views of medieval and post-medieval pottery in the region. As anyone who has written about archaeological finds of pottery in Somerset will know, it is impossible not to cite at least one of his papers.

Kenneth went on to a spectacular career given that he had left school in Liverpool at the age of 14. According to Graham Webster, his mentor at Chester, 'It was all achieved by sheer hard work and an iron determination. Inevitably Kenneth made enemies with his forthright manner, but he won friends as well and as the earliest of these I cannot but admire such gutsy will-power and capacity for work.' He established Worcestershire County Museums Service based at Hartlebury Castle, was Director at Portsmouth City Museums and then Tyne and Wear Museums and became Director of Hampshire County Museums Service in 1976 until his retirement in 1988. He was active in the work of the Museums Association, championing the cause of technical training and small society-run museums. Axbridge Museum was one of his favourite exemplars. With the encouragement of Alan Warhurst, then Director of Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery, with John Hurst he co-founded the Post-Medieval Ceramic Research Group in 1963. In 1966 this became the Society for Post-Medieval Archaeology. He widened his pottery studies, publishing many other French imports, studying medieval pottery production in Sussex and excavating especially medieval and later fortified sites. His last major excavation was at Castle Cornet in Guernsey. He was incredibly hard working, generous with sharing his extensive knowledge and encouraging others to extend our understanding of archaeological ceramics and how they could be interpreted. He was, for example, one of those who encouraged the Bickley Ceramics Project between 1981 and 2010.





It was to this end, extremely impressed by the quality of pottery collections held by Somerset County Museums Service, that he decided to give his collection of vernacular pottery mainly from Western Europe to the people of Somerset. These are not the fine wares which grace many museum collections in Britain but the everyday wares that were once so commonly found and have almost disappeared with changes in life-style in the past twenty years or so. Some forms like the Saintonge 'pegu' have persisted from the 14th century. It is intended as a memorial: 'to show the end of products of a centuries-old tradition, to marvel at its persistence and tenacity, to admire the abilities, skills and intelligence of their makers.' It forms an incomparable reference collection; an inspiration to potters, to archaeologists, to all. We are extremely lucky to have this collection in Somerset. He was last able to visit Somerset in 2007 for the Society for Post-medieval Archaeology conference on West Country Households and to introduce his collection of pottery at the County Museum to the delegates.

He will be greatly missed by his many friends and

colleagues. Our sympathies go to his wife, Marilyn, and his three children, Oliver, Tabitha and Ben.

David Dawson

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## OBITUARY: BERNARD JOSEPH STORER (1924-2017)

With the death of Bernard Storer, the county has lost one of its foremost naturalists, and one who was a tireless champion of the Somerset Levels and Moors. His devotion to Somerset belies the fact that he did not arrive here until 1957, being a Yorkshireman by birth and upbringing. He attended school in Sheffield, and then worked in the University of Sheffield, in Professor Krebs's laboratory, until he was old enough to enlist in the West Yorkshire regiment. From there he was commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant in the 7th Battalion of the 1st Punjab regiment where he made firm friends and developed a lasting fondness for curries. He completed his military service with the rank of Captain.

After his military service Bernard took a Natural Science degree at Downing College, Cambridge, where he attended ecology lectures given by Professor Godwin. This offered a new approach to the study of natural history that particularly appealed to Bernard. Following graduation and a teacher-training course, he taught for several years at a Grammar School in Bakewell, and then at an independent school in Shropshire. In 1957 he moved to Somerset, to take up the post of Head of Biology at Dr Morgan's Grammar School; it was then that he met his future wife, Connie, and that his long association with the county began. He retired from teaching in 1984, at which point he was Deputy Head of Haygrove School.

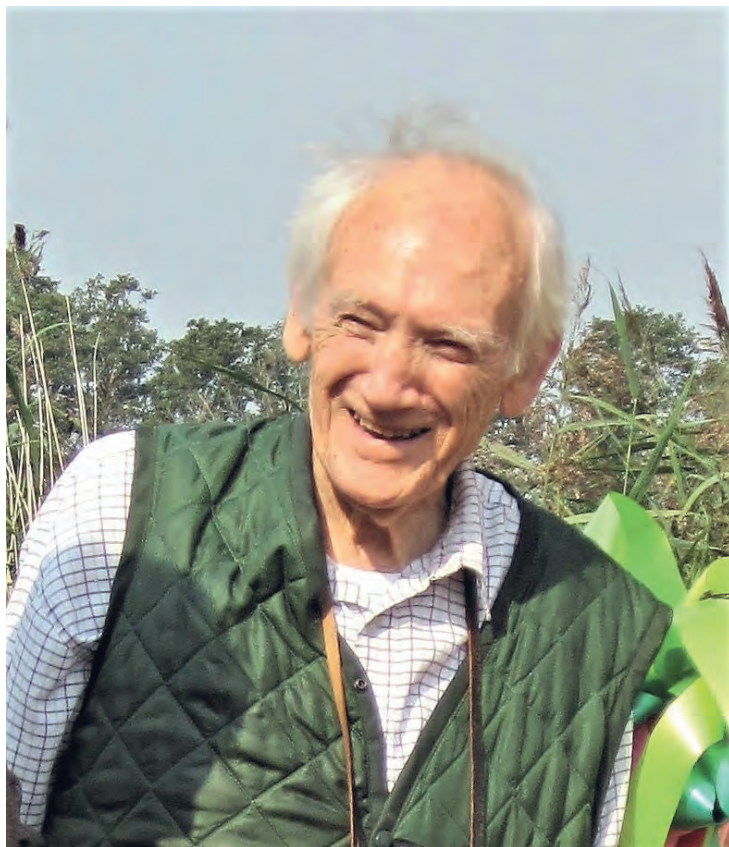
With a naturalist's 'eye', it was in the late 1950s that he began to investigate his local patch; also at this time he joined the Somerset Archaeology and Natural History Society – of which he would be a member for 58 years. Having discovered to his surprise that Somerset's peat moors were at, or below, sea level

rather than up high on bleak hillsides, he started exploring them, in particular those in the valley of the River Brue. In doing so he discovered a wealth of wildlife and became aware of the botanical importance of the area. He was concerned to find that the sites he was visiting had no protection; indeed, they didn't seem to figure at all in the calculations of those in authority apart from being areas from which to dig peat. When the Somerset Trust for Nature Conservation (now Somerset Wildlife Trust) was formed in 1964, Bernard instantly joined and was very active, holding over the years many official positions including Vice-Chairman, the Trust's representative to the Royal Society for Nature Conservation, and Chairman of the 'Central Reserves Committee'.

The potential threat to the peat moors was recognised by the newly-formed Trust, and working with Peter Tolson (a Trust member and Land Agent), they negotiated the purchase of a remnant of the Brue Valley's lowland acid peat mire system on Westhay Moor, and an area of alkaline fen-meadow on Catcott Heath. These were the first nature reserves bought by the Trust, and subsequent acquisitions have greatly enlarged them.

Over the following years Bernard, with the help of numerous volunteers, worked to understand the management required to maintain such areas. The results of this work and his wider interest in the history and development of the peat moors culminated in his book *Sedgemoor: its History and Natural History* (1972).

As chairman of the Peat Moors Committee, Bernard worked tirelessly to purchase other reserves within the Brue Valley, especially Catcott Lows reserve – an area



of drained peat previously used to grow a variety of arable crops but which is now restored, with its raised water-levels, to form the centrepiece of the Catcott complex of fen-meadows. He was also closely involved with the purchase and development of a worked-out area of peat on Westhay Moor close to the original reserve and regarded by many as an uninspiring dry hole in the ground – but one which, as Bernard pointed out, had great potential. A number of these ‘peat voids’ were appearing in the Brue Valley, and no-one could agree to what use such areas should be put. Bernard took the view that if the ‘peat void’ at Westhay Moor could be restored as a wetland nature reserve, then this would serve as a model of what could be achieved with other areas. That piece of inspired thinking kick-started a reserves acquisition policy that drew in several other groups and agencies – e.g. RSPB, Natural England and the Hawk and Owl Trust – and resulted in an extraordinary network of wetland nature reserves now collectively known as the Avalon Marshes.

Bernard was a quiet, modest man but always a ‘people person’ and very supportive. He was

President of the Mid-Somerset Naturalist Society and Chairman of the Sedgemoor Area Group of the Trust. He gave talks promoting the work of the Trust and ran courses around the county on the natural history of the peat moors; while teaching, he was involved in running a number of courses at Nettlecombe Court (Field Studies Council).

Meeting Bernard and Connie on the moors always led to interesting conversations speculating about the future of the Brue valley in general, and its nature reserves in particular. Bernard never really retired; he was always active, and in his late eighties wrote and published *Somerset Wild Flowers: a Guide to their Identification* (2014).

Today, the internationally important Avalon Marshes is a stunning wetland landscape at the heart of which are three National Nature Reserves. These special areas are home to large populations of breeding bitterns, marsh harriers, bearded tits and other wetland birds. Water voles, dragonflies, and many nationally scarce plants and rare water beetles are still common in the area.

The restoration of the old peat extraction sites has also proved a magnet for people. In the last few years the area has attracted many tens of thousands of visitors, including school children learning about their local environment, walkers enjoying the wonderful scenery and peace and quiet, birdwatchers coming to see the bitterns, great white egrets and other species for which the area is now rightly famous, and naturalists intent on studying their own particular species or more generally the natural history and ecology of reed-beds and other wetland habitats. The restored wetlands and their wildlife are a major tourist attraction, as anyone visiting in winter to watch the vast murmurations of

starlings above their reed-bed roost-sites will surely testify. But it's not just the wildlife: the area also has a rich prehistory and history, and there is much of archaeological interest too, from Neolithic trackways to the peat extraction industry of the 1950s and 1960s.

Visitors to the Avalon Marshes help to support a buoyant local economy, providing a wide range of jobs for those residing in the area. It has been, without doubt, a huge success story – and, although he probably wouldn't have admitted it, a story that has Bernard very much at its heart. He will be long missed.

David Reid and Stephen Parker