

**Obituaries**

**Isobel Richardson (1936-October 2021)** *Shirley Blaylock and Mary Ewing*

**David Rabson** *Don Church*

**Brian Murless (d. April 2022)** *David Greenfield*

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**OBITUARY: ISABEL RICHARDSON  
(1936 - OCTOBER 2021)**

The region has lost one its leading lights in the study of vernacular buildings with the death of Isabel Richardson in 2021. Her interest was sparked from her ownership and repair of an old farmstead on the fringes of Tiverton. After graduating with a Single Honours degree in Archaeology at the University of Exeter as a mature student in 1984, she started work for the National Trust in 1985 on their recently established vernacular buildings and archaeological surveys programme. Initially based at Killerton in Devon, she later worked on the Holnicote Estate, near Porlock on Exmoor, leaving a huge legacy of reports and publications on almost every vernacular building on the estates as well as some accompanying archaeological surveys. After retirement in 2001 she continued to work for the Trust on a freelance basis and was hugely respected for her knowledge of the buildings and history of the estates, as well as for the impact she had made on the Trust's understanding of them.

Working with volunteers, local groups, societies, and schools was always an important part of her life, inside and outside of work. She had a great gift of communication, with a wonderful laugh and sense of fun and hospitality, with her farming background giving her an insight into the workings of the farms she recorded and connection with people living and working in the countryside. She regularly gave talks on her work and trained others, freely passing on her knowledge and giving her time, never ceasing in her enjoyment of archaeology and the study of buildings.

In the last ten years of her life, she focussed on a number of volunteer projects, leading work at a Roman villa site in Halberton with the Tiverton Archaeological Group, of which she was a founder member. She also caught up on old work and published a report on excavations of a deserted medieval settlement at Ley Hill, on the Holnicote Estate (*SANH* 162, 9-42). As a key member of the Early Dunster Group recording medieval buildings in Dunster, she published a paper on Dunster Castle Gatehouse (*SANH* 164, 183-202), recorded as part of the project. She was active to the end and will be remembered for her friendship to so many and for her significant contribution to archaeology and the study of vernacular buildings.

Shirley Blaylock



**ISABEL RICHARDSON,  
A PERSONAL TRIBUTE**

I met Isabel through working with the Somerset Vernacular Building Group and with John Dallimore but had of course already heard of her, particularly in relation to buildings at Selworthy and also her other work in West Somerset. Her contribution to the Somerset Dendrochronology Project: Phases 5 and 6 (Mark McDermott, *SANHS Proceedings* vol. 149), was also known and is a useful source of reference.

When *SANHS* West Somerset Building Recording Group set up in 2013, she became a valuable volunteer with the group in an area familiar to her and helped us with initial work at Porlock. When the opportunity came up to apply to Historic England for their 'Early Fabric in Historic Towns' initiative at Dunster, she was very encouraging and supported the project with great enthusiasm both on the Project Team and 'on the ground' with surveys. The Castle Gatehouse was a huge job for the volunteer team but she pulled it all together with an excellent report on the building (see above). She was very well thought of in the team, not just for her encouragement but also for her companionship. A favourite comment from a team member was that "she was lovely to work with". She is missed enormously by the Early Dunster Team and our sympathies are with her family.

Mary Ewing

### DAVID RABSON, A PERSONAL TRIBUTE

Amongst his many and varied interests, David was a keen and active Morris man who started dancing in his second year at Cambridge. David's uncle was a Morris man who also went to folk dances, near to where David was living just outside Harlow. Through Uncle Bill David came into contact with the Standon Morris Men, and went to some of their practices during the Christmas vacation of his second year at Cambridge in 1963.

Later in 1963 the College Chaplain suggested that a few students might like to go to Thaxted to watch the dancing at the annual Ring Meeting (a Ring Meeting is a gathering of many Morris sides at a particular place). Thus, inspired by what he experienced, David joined The Round, the Cambridge University Country Dancing Society which was also attended by several members of the Cambridge Morris Men. The result was that David started Morris practice with Cambridge MM, and obviously excelled at his dancing, as he subsequently toured with the Travelling Morrice (the on-tour Cambridge MM) to the Cotswolds in 1964. He also danced with Manchester MM during his two postgraduate years at university, as well as with Offley MM in Hertfordshire when living in Luton.

David joined Taunton Deane Morris Men in 1979 as a valued and experienced dancer and musician, when he and his wife Sheila moved to Somerset.

David's instrument was the pipe and tabor (drum) for which he had a great talent. A seemingly simple to play three-hole pipe, but actually somewhat complex, requiring three different blow pressures to obtain the octave and a half range of notes, playing the pipe with the left hand while simultaneously playing the drum with the right. Morris is first mentioned in England in the 15th century and the pipe and tabor would have been the original accompanying instrument for the dance. It was always a pleasure to listen or dance to David's superlative playing, the notes sweet and true and the drum emphasising the beat and the dancers' movements.

David was variously described by his TDMM peers 'as one of the world's proper gentlemen, a maestro on the pipe and tabor, a talented dancer, a privilege to have known, honoured to have played alongside, historian, author, lovely man, a good and loyal friend, and a man with a formidable chuckle'. We shall miss him.

Don Church

### BRIAN MURLESS (d. APRIL 2022), A PERSONAL TRIBUTE

'Brian the historian'. That's the title I suggested to Stuart. But, of course, history is only part of the Life of Brian – I should have added that, among other things, he was also an advocate for heritage, environmental and related issues. Sorry, Brian, and farewell.

#### SIAS

I first met Brian almost exactly 50 years ago, in early 1972, when the Somerset Industrial Archaeological Society – SIAS – was established. Brian was a teacher, and in his spare time he worked in an archaeological team along the line of the proposed M5 motorway construction project. I was a young bridge engineer, with no experience in any branch of archaeology. But I could tell immediately that Brian was a proper archaeologist - because he always carried a digging trowel and a camera, and he always wore a high-vis jacket and a Jackie Stewart cap. Oh yes, and he occasionally turned up on a moped. His competence as an historian, researcher, archaeologist and public speaker proved to be invaluable when SIAS really got going.

The brick and tile industry was his major field of research interest. But the variety of industrial

archaeological subjects that other SIAS members studied gave him virtually unlimited access to an abundance of topics to research and investigate. He relished site visits – wearing hi-vis jacket and Jackie Stewart cap, of course. He contributed to the Q&A sessions after virtually every talk he attended. And he could produce a slide show, with authoritative commentary on obscure topics, at the drop of a hat. He drove hundreds of miles around Somerset with John Bentley – recording surviving milestones and other roadside furniture. His interest in Bridgwater's dock, railways and bridges inspired him to write a book – 'Bridgwater Docks & the River Parrett', published in 1983 by the Somerset Library Service. As a result, he was televised in armchair conversation with a presenter. I would guess that the majority of the 140-odd SIAS bulletins that have been published over the years contain a Murless contribution, be it large or small.

#### SANHS

Brian was also a member – a highly respected member – of the Somerset Archaeological & Natural History Society – SANHS for short. He was for many

years a trustee of the Society and, in recognition of his commitment and dedication, he was elected President of SANHS for the session 2011-2012. He responded to the honour by establishing a SANHS charitable fund with the objective of supporting the preparation of Somerset-related heritage items to be made available for public study. Over the years the Murless Fund has contributed to the digitisation of a variety of important collections of maps, photographs and other items that were fragile and rapidly deteriorating.

### SWHT

Having been a regular researcher at the old Somerset County Records Office at Obridge, Brian relished the mod-cons at the new premises provided for Somerset Archives and Local Studies out at Norton Fitzwarren, under the auspices of the South West Heritage Trust. His aptitude for documentary research, coupled with his local knowledge, has resulted in the documenting of numerous previously unidentified records. Talking of records, I think it's fair to say that Brian was the most prolific contributor to the Somerset Historic Environment Record, which records the archaeological sites and heritage buildings of Somerset.

### A couple of personal memories

Brian's interest in Bridgwater Docks extended to 'Bertha' – the steam driven dredger, built to a design of Isambard Kingdom Brunel, that cleared the mud from the docks for over 100 years. Bertha is currently being restored to working order, next door to the ss Great Britain at Bristol. Sadly, Brian will not see Bertha in action.

Brunel's connection with Bridgwater led Brian to research a little deeper. He discovered that one of Brunel's former assistants, George Hennet, set up an ironworks in Bridgwater. Intrigued, Brian researched Hennet's life and times – and his definitive biography of Hennet was published in 2008. On the strength of that, Brian was invited (by me) to join an anarchic ad-hoc gang of Brunel fanatics – nicknamed Bridges Wot Brunel Built. The experience widened his knowledge and enjoyment of bridges, engineering and Brunel tremendously.

Another Bridgwater-related exercise that Brian got me involved in is the story of Bridgwater-born John Bowen, who travelled to India in the early 1800's and made a fortune after he transported the enormous components of a large bridge 800 miles by river through Bengal. I'm still working on that tale.

David Greenfield