SANHS News

The newsletter of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society

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

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Cover Picture: From the first ever SANHS webinar: SANHS President, David Dawson at Dunster Pottery Kiln (see p.7)

Editorial

This truly has been a year like no other in living memory. Last year I wrote that we were 'in challenging times', little imagining that coronavirus would still be rife a year later with severe restrictions on our personal freedoms the only effective means of control throughout 2020.

So, Society activities have been severely curtailed and we have had a year without face-to-face meetings. Technology offered one way forward and SANHS first dipped its toe into on-line meetings in August; Dr Lizzie Induni, who has chaired many of these 'webinars', describes her experiences on p.7. A place will remain, no doubt, for web-based meetings in the future, but I'm sure many will welcome the resumption of traditional meetings and outings; the social interactions which occur are often the place where ideas for new research emerge.

Although meetings of Mick Aston's Young Archaeologists have been suspended during coronavirus, I would commend to you Liz Caldwell's summary of their activities over the first five years (see p.26). I am pleased to see quotes from some of the members. Perhaps in the future one of them will be contributing to the News or the Proceedings: I'm sure we all would hope that to be so.

For many years, Dr Philip Radford has penned 'Nature Notes' describing the changes to the natural history of the area over the year. With lockdown, Philip, who celebrated his 100th birthday (see p.30), has not been able to get out. We do, however, welcome the chair of the Natural History Section, David Reid, who has focused on what he has seen in his garden during lockdown.

As always, thanks to everyone who has provided material and responded to my queries. Apologies for outstanding errors or omissions which are entirely my responsibility. Contributions please for the next SANHS News at the latest by February 2022.

Martin Salzer
East Coker, March 2021

From the Chair

When I wrote the chairman's contribution to the newsletter last year, little did I realise what lay ahead of us all. As the Heritage Centre closed down, Louisa our office manager packed up the office computer and other stuff she would need and set herself up with an office at home. She collected the post on a weekly basis and carried on working from home until the Heritage Centre re-opened. Computer and all else were returned to the office after re-opening, only to be returned home in December where it remains. I didn't realise how much we rely on face-to-face conversation.

I think we were all in shock in the beginning, but Louisa installed Zoom and board meetings went ahead. We now have a small team of volunteers who manage the webinars and a bit of persuasion to speakers has ensured good quality viewing. David Dawson kick started us followed by the Dunster Research Group, a very professionally produced production which gained us a new member from the other side of the country. If you are on our email list, when you receive a poster for an event, please forward to anyone you think may be interested.

At the AGM in September, Julian Orbach stood down and was replaced as President by David Dawson. The members voted two new Trustees onto the board, Dr Lizzie Induni, and Mark Lidster. Lizzie recently completed her PhD on corrugated buildings and is also chairman of the Historic Buildings committee. Mark is a conservation officer and has been very instrumental in sourcing stone used in the renovation of the Castle Gardens. I write separately about progress on the gardens (see p.9), suffice it here to reiterate my thanks to numerous individuals and organisations for their support.

We were very excited to have recruited an under 30s trustee with remarkable skills in media. Unfortunately, he had to resign due to health problems prior to the AGM. We have since recruited Dr. Harriet Induni, (also a younger member), who has a wide range of skills. She has taken on further development of the website and is developing a members-only area.

David Victor stood down as Honorary Treasurer at the 2019 AGM. He has continued in the interim but will cease once the 2020 accounts are finalised. Should any members be interested, David has written a summary and a job description with the time he anticipates it takes. These can be obtained from Louisa. A post that has been vacant for a number of years is Honorary Secretary. This is a key position that requires someone who has preferably had experience in management. I have tried to carry this role out as well as chairman, but I have found it very difficult and caused our office manager much anguish. I will also be standing down at the AGM, having completed three of my four years.

There is so much activity within the society that board meetings have been lengthy, but I will touch on just one issue: a decision has been made to charge £5 for all new programmed webinars; this has been by donation until now and has brought in some welcome funds.

A priority for the trustees this year will be raising finance for our general fund, money that keeps the society going. We have had a whole year of not being able to hold events to bring in extra money, but our outgoings have not decreased. We need to find ways to ensure a regular increase in our income as all of our costs increase year on year. The cost of membership was last increased in January 2011. Without the generous donation of a business the Proceedings would have been at risk for the past two years.

Hopefully, we will be able to have face-to-face events later in the year, but we have realised the value of the webinars for those without transport, living far away, and those who will naturally be wary of crowds. We hope to continue with a mix of both. It has been an extremely difficult year for everyone, especially those without support and isolated, but light seems to be at the end of the tunnel. My best wishes to you all for the coming year, stay safe and stay well.

Chris Jessop, SANHS Chair

Library News 2020

The SANHS Library, housed at the Somerset Heritage Centre, continues to grow, by purchase, exchange and donations from members – even during these difficult lockdown months.

Somerset Heritage Centre, where the library is housed, is currently closed and no visitors are allowed. When it reopens later in 2021 we will be able to resume our library service. SANHS members can borrow books, though not journal parts, and anyone can consult library materials at the Heritage Centre. Ongoing projects, which will be continued when circumstances permit, include cataloguing the Miscellaneous Topographic Illustrations collection – a varied collection of prints and photographs, large and small, from across the county.

Acquisitions in 2020 included:

- *Avifauna, atlases & authors: a personal view of local ornithology in the United Kingdom from the earliest times to 2019,* by David Ballance.
- *The Somerset bird list, 2020,* also by David Ballance.
- And the popular *100 Birds,* by Somerset photographer Carl Bovis.
- A splendid new edition of *Roman Imperial Coinage, vol. II, part 3: AD117-138, Hadrian,* by Richard A Abdy & R F Mittag (2019). We already hold the earlier volumes in this definitive series, from 1926.
- *Of mounds and men: the prehistoric barrows of the Frome area,* by Mick Davis (2020)
- The very readable *Glastonbury holy thorn: story of a legend,* by Adam Stout (2020) – see p.29.
- The first four titles from *River Friend, a series of riverine books* covering the natural history, landscape, environment and social interpretation of rivers. SANHS member Dr Sylvia Haslam co-edited these.
- *Cruck building: a survey,* edited by Nat Alcock (2019).

- *Too fond of winning: the story of Henry Stanley and Quantock Lodge cricket,* by Barry Phillips (2019).

A complete list of 2020 library acquisitions, along with items of Somerset interest from non-Somerset journals received, will be published in SANHS Proceedings, vol 163. We continue to receive journals from about 35 UK societies and institutions in exchange for copies of *Somerset Archaeology and Natural History* (our Proceedings), in addition to a further 50 or so journal subscriptions.

Sue Goodman
Deputy Librarian & Chair of SANHS Library committee

John Coles FBA, FSA, Hon FSAScot
25 March 1930 – 14 October 2020

The Society regrets to report the death of one of our distinguished honorary members and an archaeologist who has probably done more in recent years to change our understanding of the archaeology of our county than any other single person.

Professor John Coles first became interested in the potential of the Somerset Levels and Moors in 1964. He was joined in 1971 by Bryony Orme, whom he later married. Together their fieldwork extended across the area up until 1989 when commercial scale peat cutting ended. In wider terms they pioneered wetland archaeology. In local terms they left us, through the Somerset Levels Project, with a legacy of a landscape never before imagined except in terms of Bulleid and St George Gray's excavations of the Lake Villages. These too were re-examined, by fieldwork at Meare and in retrospective analysis with Steve Minnitt at Glastonbury. John's enthusiastic espousal of experimental archaeology was the inspiration behind today's Avalon Marshes Centre. A full obituary is to be published in Proceedings.

Our deepest sympathies go to Bryony.

David Dawson, President

The SANHS Website

My name's Harriet Induni and I've just taken over the post of Website Manager for SANHS. I am also a Trustee for the society, and help run the Webinars. I recently finished a PhD in English, which focused on heritage and ruins – interests which I can also pursue in SANHS.

I'm very excited to be developing the SANHS website, and there are lots of ways to expand and enrich it. The big upcoming change is adding a "Members Only" area, which means there will be content that only SANHS Members can view. This will include the two most recent years of the Proceedings. There will also be special webinars; documents and photos from the Dunster project; a slide collection of Somerset buildings by Commander Williams – and much more. Every member will be emailed a password to login and access fascinating resources.

As Web Manager, it will also be great to introduce practical improvements that give SANHS an up-to-date digital presence – for instance by making it possible to join the society online, and using the site to help members communicate with each other. I'm also making sure the website is a great way to find out about all the events hosted by SANHS and other local societies. Go online to discover our upcoming programme of lectures, as well as volunteering opportunities. If you have any news or articles that deserve a place online, do get in touch! Just send me an email at **webmanager@sanhs.org**.

No Internet Access

You can still access the website even if you don't have home access to the internet. Your local library is a good place to try; most libraries provide public access to such services. If this is all new to you, accessing the SANHS website is about as easy as it can be. Just log on using the credentials provided to you by the library, and run the internet browser provided at that site. Then type into the browser: **www.sanhs.org** and press the return key. The SANHS home page will appear in response and you can readily navigate around the site. You will need to be a member of the library and will most likely need to book a computer beforehand. There is likely to be someone to help you if you are unsure or you could visit with a computer-savvy friend. Once you've tried it, I'm sure you will return.

Privacy Policy Update

The SANHS website will soon have a Members' Area. Members will be emailed a password to login and get special access to material such as webinars and the Proceedings. Members' personal information will now be used by additional third parties: Restrict Content Pro and WordPress. You can opt-out at any time. The software will control access to content at **www.sanhs.org**. It will use the following:

- Email address
- First and last names
- Username and password

These details will be stored securely. SANHS and its third parties will not use this data for commercial gain, or any purpose beyond providing website access. Members can have their online records deleted at any time by emailing **webmanager@sanhs.org**.

The SANHS Webinars

When the Covid-19 virus first appeared in March 2020 it soon became obvious that it would not be possible to run SANHS events and meetings as we normally would. We had to find a new way forward. Members of the committees met and inspired by the Lundy webinar talks, which were going out on the internet, we decided to make some of our own. We were fortunate to have a young trustee – Nathanael Williams – who had a lot of experience in running webinars, and he offered to help us solve the situation.

Dr Lizzie Induni as we see her when chairing a SANHS webinar.

David Dawson was the first lecturer; his subject was the old kiln in Dunster (see cover photo). We put together a mixture of film and photographs – the filming had the advantage of drawing the viewer into the narrative – allowing the viewer

to feel more engaged with the topic. Nathanael skillfully united the film and photographs, expertly editing the shakes from the wobbly filming and after a few rehearsals, the first SANHS webinar was born.

The Dunster lecture was well attended – we had about 45 viewers – and it was quickly followed by a further 6 talks from Mary Ewing's Dunster project. Lectures were given by Jerry Sampson, who is well known to many SANHS members, Nat Alcock, who is familiar to those interested in vernacular architecture and others involved in the work at Dunster.

Just before Christmas the Natural History committee ran a webinar on fungi by Steve Parker, which has been extended into an educational series of six talks.

More recently we linked up with the South Somerset Archaeological Group who persuaded their president Julian Richards to talk about '6000 years of pottery in 60 minutes'. As well as this, the archaeology committee will be running their archaeology day on the 27th of March.

We now have a great team of people helping run the webinars, Tony Harding, Hattie Induni, Nathanael and myself, but we would love to have more people involved. If you would like to be part of the team, please email me. lizzieinduni@gmail.com

Lizzie Induni, Feb 2021

The Castle Gardens

As a number of members will be aware, the Society was successful in obtaining a grant from the National Lottery to the tune of £59,000, due to the efforts of Martin Davidson supported by Dr Janet Tall of the South West Heritage Trust (SWHT). Initially, the cost of the project was £89,000. Martin had raised sufficient to enable a general improvement to the whole site. As with all things of this magnitude, by the time we were able to commence the structural work, 2-3 years after it was initially planned, costs had escalated. With the final figure being £150,000, we raised more funds but were grateful to the Somerset West and Taunton Council who stepped in and provided the final shortfall. We will have a garden worthy of a Society that is still functioning since its formation in 1849.

SAHNS volunteer Anthony Bruce commenced work in 2018 and cleared and killed the ivy which had damaged the east curtain wall. From February 2019 one volunteer for one half day per week worked clearing ivy and valerian from the lower structures. They were joined by another volunteer in September, but lockdown stopped work in March. When we were permitted to continue, the team was increased to five regulars with the occasional help of three others. See p.11 for comments from one of our volunteers. It is anticipated work will not be finished until the end of 2021 and weekly maintenance will be required thereafter.

With clearing many of the overgrown bushes, there is now a clear visual link with our other asset, the castle itself. Work has also uncovered structures which were not previously visible, the lovely Norman well, two sets of steps and two paths, one of which is partially cobbled. The beech trees form a lovely shaded dell and some planting

has taken place of ferns, cyclamen, primroses and foxgloves. English bluebells will be added in the spring.

A set of steps which were partially visible under masses of ivy are thought to be constructed from stone from the St Mary's church tower which was rebuilt in the late 19th century. One of our members, who is keeping an overview of the construction work, has also researched the hexagonal stones which form an edging to one part of the garden and also one set of uncovered steps. He thought these may have come from the Kinglake Cross which was erected in the Parade in 1867 and removed in 1934. Looking at photographs, there doesn't appear to be enough of this shape. We would welcome any information members have as to where these stones may have come from.

The Castle Hotel took a lease on the gardens and landscaped them in 1938 following Harold St George Gray's archaeological dig in the 1920s. It would seem sensible to presume the steps and garden edging was part of that work. One visitor to the museum came into the garden and said she had regularly visited the gardens with her father as a child and had never seen the well or the steps. She intends to bring her son to explore the nooks and crannies once the work is complete - it will delight many a child.

New paths and steps have been constructed and the slope to the upper area of the garden will be easier for people with mobility problems. All of the ancient walls have now been cleared, and an archaeological investigation was carried out by SWHT on an area that had collapsed. The findings will be

written up and hopefully placed on our website. I don't think anything exciting was discovered, but it confirmed some previously held thoughts. The builders have now moved off-site but fencing, gates and a handrail have still to be installed.

There is a continuous photographic record of the garden clearance which will continue to be added to. Mrs Chris Webster, one of the team of gardeners, has put some of the photographs on the SANHS website and will add to them over the term of the project. We hope to use the pictures in a film about the project including discussions with the volunteers, but need someone with technical know-how to assist.

We look forward to when we can hold events in the garden for all to enjoy.

Chris Jessop
Photos: Mrs Chris Webster

Volunteering at the Castle Gardens

One of our volunteers describes his work at the Castle Gardens and how it has helped him during these difficult times.

I became a volunteer in the Castle Gardens, sometimes called the Norman Gardens, in July 2020. Helping in the gardens has been a big help with the state of my mind in the lockdown. I had a lot of volunteer jobs pre-lockdown in charity shops, none of which have yet re-opened. I also volunteered at the Heritage Centre, where I read through newspapers and note when a village is mentioned. The staff put that online and people can see, for instance, that the Bridgwater Mercury mentioned Stoke St Gregory in February 1903 and June 1934.

As the gardens are so big it is not difficult to socially distance. I spent one morning clearing the ivy from a wall and didn't see any one unless I went for a walk round the garden. The wall looks quite old but it isn't thought to be original. There was wire attached to it as though at one time plants climbed up. It is in the area we call the dell, large beech trees mean it is

always in the shade and when it rains it gives some protection. We don't stop gardening when it rains!

I walk into town and that is good exercise as well as the gardening. It is odd that I am volunteering as I have a gardener in my own garden: one of the other volunteers does the same.

Trevor working in the gardens

I class myself as unskilled labour: I have mown the grass including the bank the other side of the wall from the courtyard, deadheaded the roses, cut back shrubs, helped to build a massive compost heap which the wildlife will love, and riddled some earth when the archaeologists did some excavating. I also dug out some steps uncovered by another volunteer.

As we are now in lockdown fully, we are not going into the garden and I miss the contact.

Trevor Rees

The Early Dunster Project

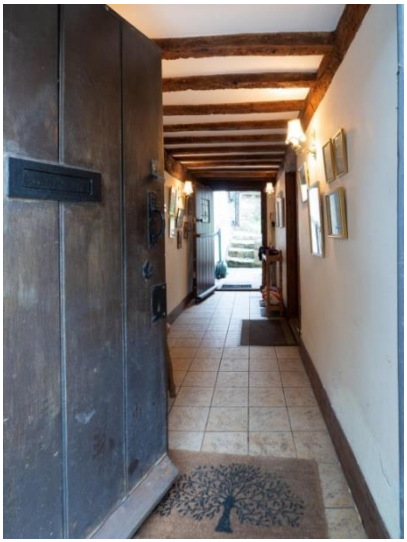
Like everything these days, the Early Dunster Project has been adversely affected by the pandemic and surveys with volunteers have ground to a halt. However, not everything has stood still and we now have a list of 44 properties to investigate, of which we have completed 20 surveys, and there are still further key additional properties that we would like to look at: work which will keep us going for some time. Fortunately, Historic England have intimated that they will look kindly upon further extensions of time.

Panoramic view of the west elevation of the Old Priory showing the extreme complexity of much rebuilding and results of fire at left (photo: Tony Harding)

After the initial shock of the lockdown, we started having Project Meetings by Zoom and when it became apparent that a live event in September would be a very difficult option, the decision to hold an on-line event was made. Very capable members of the Project Team took this on; it was very professionally handled and the event was a great success. Parts of the on-line exhibition and some of the recordings are still available on the event reports section of the SANHS website.

Visits have been made to only three of the properties that have recently come onto our books with only two or so individuals attending. All of these are particularly interesting, one in Church Street having the earliest yet domestic dendro-date (1309) from Time Team's work in Dunster. This property has true (raised) crucks and originally had wind bracing. Another in High Street has timber framed upper floors, a feature we are finding further evidence for in Dunster. The most recently visited was a house with fine arch braced roof structure with wind bracing.

Fine arch braced roof (photo: Alison Bunning)



Typical Dunster cross passage
(photo: Tony Harding)

Other work has involved completing drawings and writing up roof and other notes. Some comparative work is starting to come together, but investigation of more buildings is needed before a complete picture can be assembled. In addition to this, research work has been ongoing on rate and tax returns and a full reference list for all local records. This of course was easier when the Somerset Record Office was open, but - on the other hand - more data is now available on-line.

Some of the houses are presenting us with puzzles, for instance two in Church Street which have extensions to the cruck frames which led to a lively e-mail discussion with a member of SVBRG. Other work currently being undertaken is preparation of a pair of booklets covering the on-line exhibition which will be made available to SANHS members and at Dunster Museum. The Project exhibition at the Museum is also currently being updated.

Mary Ewing Jan 2021

A Carpentry Conundrum …

Surveys undertaken so far by the Early Dunster Project are revealing a rich variety of carpentry styles and jointing techniques used within timber frames and roof structures, many of which survive from medieval times. One of our longer-term aims is to look for any patterns in which particular features tend to occur together, or across a typical date range.

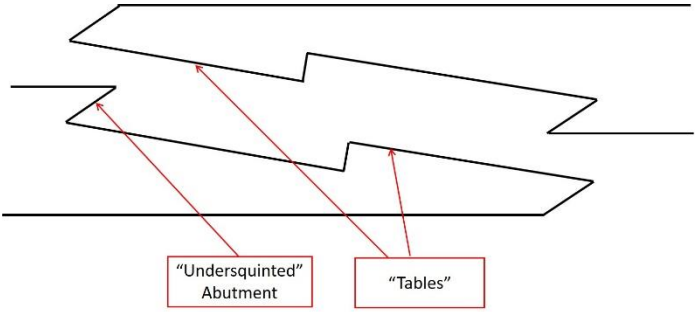
One feature which is causing us much interest is a type of joint known as a splayed (ie diagonally cut) scarf joint, used to join 2 pieces of timber end-to-end. The joint and variations of it are well-known in medieval buildings both in the UK and Europe. Indeed, we have found a fine example of this joint form in one of the earliest known roofs in Dunster.

Scarf joint in an early 14th century true cruck frame in Dunster

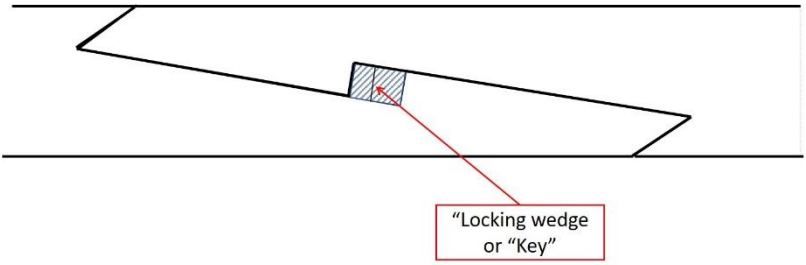
The joint was used here to extend the cruck blade, presumably because the available timber was of insufficient size or quality to form the blade in one piece.
The abutments (highlighted at top left and bottom right) are angled ("under-squinted") to lock the joint together at the ends. Although now reinforced with a steel bolt, the joint was secured originally with four heavy wooden pegs running horizontally through and wedged into place.

Interestingly, we are finding a similar style of joint used in much later (18th or possibly even 19th century) replacement/restoration work in Dunster roofs. This form of the joint, which might technically be called *"splayed and tabled under-squinted scarf with key",* is also known more poetically as *"Trait de Jupiter"*, believed to be after the form of lightning bolt wielded by the Roman god Jupiter.

Once the matching halves of the joint are assembled and the wedged key is driven in securely, the joint assembly becomes very tight and strong.



Exploded view of the "Trait de Jupiter" joint showing diagonally cut ("splayed") tables and "under-squinted" abutments



Assembled view with wedged locking key in place, forcing the two halves of the joint to interlock tightly

"Trait de Jupiter" joint in a later Dunster roof

The joint is quite tricky to mark out and form (I know because I had a go at making one myself!) and one thought is whether a template may have been used to help with this. One of the things we'd love to do as soon as we can get back to surveying, is to make some detailed tracings and

see if these later examples of the joint we've found are identical in size and shape. If so, that would suggest that a template was indeed used, and that the joints were possibly even made by the same carpenter and perhaps his apprentice!

Tony Harding

Socially Distanced Digging
or how to keep going during a pandemic

The Westbury Archaeology Group normally meets once a week throughout the year, so when Covid hit the UK back in March, we had to stop all activity. At the time, this didn't seem too much of a problem as our main site had become too wet to dig because of winter rain.

The Group's core purpose is archaeological research within Westbury-sub-Mendip parish, but for a long time we've known that our weekly meetings have an important social element. So, as the first lockdown eased, we looked for a way to get together again. Our only open site at that point was too small to allow digging with 2m distance between us, so we decided to organise a landscape walk for the permitted maximum of six people. It quickly became obvious that we needed to do the walk on two consecutive days to allow everyone to take part. Our first walk took us up Lynchcombe to Ramspits and Deer Leap. It was great to be back together again, and we really enjoyed looking at humps and bumps and trying to visualise how the farmstead and area around it might have looked in medieval times. The following week we went out on to Westbury Moor, and did a circular walk past Gooseland, down to the Axe and back. On both these walks we relied heavily on research by the late Barry Lane, who started the Group.

By now we were into June and planning more weekly walks, but then we got a call from a local farmer who had spotted interesting parch marks in one of his fields. A short site visit told us that these were certainly interesting, and, fortuitously, they covered a large area. A quick calculation showed us that we could easily fit twelve or more small trenches spaced more than 2m apart onto the site. So, our dig plan was based on trenches suitably spread around the perimeter of the site, each

one being dug either by a single person or by a two-person 'bubble'.

It is always important to ensure people's safety, so we did a full Covid Risk Assessment, then revised our Site Risk Assessment to reflect the risks and mitigations needed. These include no sharing of equipment, use of masks, gloves and sanitiser, distancing, and team leaders responsible for ensuring compliance. Sadly, sharing food was also on the list, so we faced a much-reduced choice of biscuits at tea breaks.

We normally have 8 to 12 people digging each Wednesday, but the 'Rule of 6' was in place, so we started by splitting our group into two. The theory was that each team would stay within one half of the site and not mix with anyone from the other half. However, this proved difficult for all of us, particularly when there was an interesting find to look at, and at tea breaks. The shouts of "Distance!" grew more frequent as the weeks passed. It became clear that, if we wanted to keep digging safely and legally, the two groups had to work on different days.

Then the government announced Lockdown 2.0, and that it was now 1+1 rather than 6. The solution: divide yet again, this time into five two-person teams, and dig 5 days a week - and that's what we're doing as I write this.

The 'take away' from the last few months? That our weekly dose of community archaeology <u>really</u> matters to the group. We are continuing to uncover the history of our parish, and learning new information and skills, but equally important is the social contact, especially at a time when many of us are isolated from family and friends. I'm sure our regular meetings, even the 1+1 ones, have helped us cope with the effects of the pandemic, and will continue to do so.

What next? We're fortunate that the landowner both welcomes us and

understands that there will be many changes of plan over the coming months. The two obvious uncertainties are what the regulations will be after Lockdown 2.0, and how many rainy days we get between now and the spring. One thing is certain though - we will continue to meet, whether we are walking or digging.

Readers will notice that we haven't said what we think the site may be, nor given its location; this is at the request of the landowner.

Andrew Buchanan

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: Harvest Mouse Study - SANHS News p.22

Maltwood Fund

Scope: Research in archaeology & history

Examples: Radio-carbon dating of bone fragment –SANHS News 2020
Somerset folksingers - SANHS News 2020

Gray Fund

Scope: Public engagement in archaeology & history

Example: Support to Mick Aston's Young Archaeologists – SANHS News p.26

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

The projects described in the following four articles have all benefitted from SANHS Grants.

A Neolithic Timber Circle in Priddy, Somerset - the "Priddy woodhenge"

In July 2019, excavations were undertaken at the site of a pit circle in Priddy [Mendip Hills AONB], discovered through geophysical survey by local community archaeology group ALERT. The excavations form part of the Priddy Environs Project (PEP), which is investigating the origins and development of human activity in Priddy, run by Dr Jodie Lewis and Dr David Mullin, now in its 9th year.

Excavations of a sample of the c. 16m diameter circle revealed it to comprise deep, rock-cut pits, which had once contained posts. The posts had been deliberately removed and the pits backfilled at the end of the site's life. The lower fill of the pits, representing remnants of clay packing around the posts, contained charcoal, as did the upper fills: both fills were sampled for environmental analysis.

In 2019, the Maltwood Fund awarded a grant towards the assessment of these environmental samples. The results revealed that oak stemwood charcoal dominated the assemblage, with lesser amounts of wild gathered foods including hazelnuts, crab apples and sloes. Cereal remains associated with post-Roman cultivation (oats and cf. bread wheat) suggest the incorporation of material deriving from later activity on the site. Radiocarbon dating has now been undertaken and the results show that the main period of use was around 3000 BC. This confirms that the monument is a Neolithic timber circle, the first proven by excavation in Somerset.

Jodie Lewis

Geophysical Survey – Nye – North Somerset Levels

A group of earthworks showed up on lidar at the eastern end of the 'island' of Nye in the North Somerset Levels. The present farm is adjacent to a scheduled moated manor site in existence by the late 12th century. There are a small number of historical references to a possible hithe associated with the area around Nye in the 14th century.

SANHS member Liz Caldwell of GeoFlo carries out the survey at Nye

James Bond completed an earthwork survey in May 2018. A geophysical survey was carried out by GeoFlo in August 2020. The work was supported by the Maltwood Fund of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society.

The results show that the area on top of the island is relatively undisturbed, whereas the east field, where the most prominent earthworks lie, reveals clearly noticeable areas of positive and negative magnetic anomalies, which do not correlate with the earthworks, but the readings could possibly represent human activity associated with the earthworks.

The survey detected a very weak linear trend running northwest - southeast across the survey area. Although readings are magnetically weak, their similarity in alignment increases confidence in their integrity, possibly suggesting an earlier activity phase to the earthworks and current field system.

Teresa Hall

Supporting the Harvest Mouse at Carymoor

Carymoor Environmental Trust has been working to encourage the Harvest Mouse on its nature reserve, thanks to a grant from the Pat Hill-Cottingham fund. The Trust is an environmental education and nature conservation charity based near Castle Cary and, in normal times, 5000 people annually visit the site to learn about living more sustainably and to experience local wildlife first-hand.

Carymoor is a nature reserve with a difference. Established in 1996 the charity has transformed 80 acres of capped landfill into a mosaic of different habitats, with meadows, wetlands and woodland. The area was used as a landfill from 1970 to 2000 and contains over 2 million m^3 of waste, mostly coming from households in South Somerset and Mendip. The waste is covered over with 1 to 2m of clay which cap the site, and this was the blank canvas Carymoor took on when they started their habitat creation work. Since work began in 1996 the reserve has become home to a number of priority species including the Small Blue and Brown Hairstreak butterflies, Great Crested Newt, Slow Worm, Grass Snake and the Harvest Mouse. Carymoor is supported by a dedicated team of volunteer wildlife recorders who help to monitor the numbers of key species.

The Harvest Mouse (*Micromys minutus)* is a generally elusive small mammal and has become more scarce in recent times, largely due to a decline in suitable habitat and changes in agricultural practices. The mouse is mostly nocturnal and is the only British mammal to have a

prehensile tail which it uses to move through long grass. The Harvest Mouse builds a unique spherical nest by weaving together grasses. Although nests had been found at Carymoor over the years, their distribution across the nature reserve was not well understood. The team wanted to undertake some specific monitoring to find out about the population and where possible to encourage the Harvest Mouse through the provision of suitable foraging and overwintering habitat.

Thanks to the grant from the Pat Hill-Cottingham fund Carymoor was able to invest in 12 Longworth mammal traps to carry out a monitoring programme. Two of Carymoor's team attended a training course learning how to handle small mammals, what legislation was involved, and setting up the transect at Carymoor. The first transect took place in October 2019 and although no harvest mice were found the team gained valuable practice with the traps and process. In November 2019 a nest ball search was conducted on the transect and seven nests were found. All the nests were found in rough grass margins on the site edge where the hedge has been recently laid. As a result, Carymoor staff now cut the margins in small sections on rotation to encourage rough grassland and to suppress dominant bramble growth. The cut is undertaken after nest searches have been completed in November / December.

Although the monitoring programme was disrupted by Covid in 2020, further nest searches were carried out in November and December 2020, with Carymoor staff assisted by volunteers. Eight nests were found and for the first time two nests were found on the capped area of the nature reserve, meaning the Harvest Mouse has migrated across the perimeter road on to the main site. The Carymoor team were delighted to find this and have extended their monitoring area for 2021. The team is yet to catch a Harvest Mouse on the monitoring transect, but with more regular monitoring planned for 2021 it can only be a matter of time! This project underlines the important role brownfield sites can play in protecting wildlife, providing safe havens for nature and transforming the legacy of wastefulness into something more positive.

Rupert Farthing

Somerset's Local Geological Sites

The project to review Somerset's Local Geological Sites (LGS), which the Somerset Geology Group (SGG) in partnership with Somerset Environmental Records Centre (SERC) commenced in 2016, is making good progress and is projected to complete in 2022-23. This is a little longer than the original schedule, but, as one might expect from a new process working on sites last visited more than 30 years ago, there have been many challenges along the way including a global pandemic! For the 2017, 2018 and 2019 field seasons we were able to hire two students/graduate volunteers to complete the bulk of the field work during the summer. This was not possible in 2020 and is unlikely to be possible for 2021 so we are very grateful for the continued support of a small group of SGG volunteers towards completing the review.

The history and methodology of the project have already been described in detail in volume 162 of the Proceedings, accordingly the purpose of this report is to report progress to date and future plans. At the time of writing the reconfirmation of 66% of Somerset's c. 224 LGS has been agreed by the LGS Panel - this has been meeting twice yearly (currently on-line) to consider the recommendations of the SERC-based graduate or SGG volunteers who have researched and surveyed the sites.

For the purposes of the survey, we have divided the county into convenient blocks to coincide with the geology which as a result closely follow geography but not always the administrative areas. We have completed the Exmoor, Quantocks Hills and Vale of Taunton Deane areas and most of the work required for the Mendip Hills area. We are currently working on the LGS in South Somerset after which there will only be a few LGS surveys in the Blackdown Hills needed to finish the project. Reports summarising the results for each area are compiled once the work in that area is finished.

Detail of our progress, including the area reports as they are finalised, can be found on the SGG page on SERC's web site at:
http://wp.somerc.co.uk/specialist-groups/somerset-geology-group/

Aside from the pandemic, the challenges of the survey have concerned access to, condition of and reasons for designating the sites. For around 26% of the sites we have been unable to obtain permission for survey. This may be because SERC has been unable to identify the owner or we did not receive a reply to our request – or occasionally permission may be refused. Where there is no permission a second-best option has often been to reconnaissance survey from a nearby public footpath, but where that is not possible we assess the site from previous survey information and open sources such as imagery.

With the completion of the project now in sight we can look forward to Somerset having a robust scientific dataset which will support the protection of its LGS. There is potential for several to benefit from conservation work to enhance their value. It is also becoming clear that much more interpretative information on geology could be provided for the public (not necessarily on-site but also more generally) to help in their understanding of our local landscape and habitats.

Our review has been of existing LGS only, but during the project we have identified several potential new LGS. We are one of only three counties, and by far the largest, to have reviewed its LGS and we hope that the procedures we have developed will be useful for others counties. We are very grateful to all those who have or are supporting the project - including SANHS. The work will go on - and has potential to lead to many future positive outcomes.

Garry Dawson

Mick Aston's Young Archaeologists - the story so far …

Mick Aston's Young Archaeologists is a branch of the national Young Archaeologists Club (YAC) run by the Council for British Archaeology. In 2012 Mick Aston wrote a letter to SANHS about the future of the Society and how a Young Archaeologists Club in Somerset would encourage interest in SANHS amongst the younger generation. Very sadly Mick passed away the following year but the seed had been sown. It took a few years to get everything organised but MAYA was finally launched in April 2016.

I'm happy to report that the club has been extremely successful right from the start. We tend to have between 30 – 35 members, with around 20 regularly attending our sessions. The age range is 8 to 16 years which is quite an age difference! Most of our members are around 10 -12 years old, but we have some younger ones and a handful of older teenagers too. We also have a substantial waiting list, but I'm happy to report that branches of the Young Archaeologists Club have also now been set up at Wells and Weston-super-Mare museums. It just goes to show that interest in archaeology amongst children and young people is as strong as ever.

Our indoor sessions are held at the Museum of Somerset but we also tend to get out and about in the county as much as possible. We have been lucky enough to receive support from many archaeologists in Somerset and beyond, which has enabled us to run a wide range of

engaging sessions for our members. Up until March 2020 we ran a session every month but Covid-19 has of course put a stop to everything. However, I thought I'd write a quick overview of what MAYA has been up to since we started, highlighting some of our more memorable sessions.

The most exciting activity for our members is undoubtedly excavation! During MAYA's first year the South Somerset Archaeological Research Group invited MAYA to take part in their excavation of a Roman midden near Martock. In subsequent years we were fortunate enough to attend Exeter University's excavations of the Roman site at Ipplepen. Our visits to Ipplepen were made possible by the SANHS Gray Fund which very kindly paid for a coach as it was too long a journey to expect parents to provide transport. I asked our members for some feedback whilst writing this article and Callum age 12 said, *"My favourite YAC activity is going to digs because we find things that haven't been seen for a long time. I also like doing the geophysical surveys and visiting places."*

We've also had a number of sessions looking at finds, including pottery, bones, flint and material from environmental archaeology samples. Perhaps one of the most entertaining of these was our session on animal bones run by Dr Clare Randall. This included a "Reconstruct a Sheep" workshop where the MAYANS were given

bones from three different sheep which they had to try and identify and then work out which bit went where!

We have been lucky enough to have a couple of celebrity guests too. Phil Harding attended MAYA's launch event and has come along twice since then to support our special family archaeology days. MAYA has also had a lot of support from Julian Richards who ran a couple of very popular sessions, one about Stonehenge and another which involved excavating a Bronze Age roundhouse… indoors!

Other activities have included visits to the Somerset Rural Life Museum, the Bridgwater Brick and Tile Museum and Fairfield House where Lady Gass made us very welcome. We've recorded earthworks on the Quantocks, carried out geophysical surveys, made prehistoric pottery, and mummified oranges! We've cooked food medieval style, made Roman mosaics, visited WWII sites along the Taunton Stop Line and been to the Avalon Marshes Centre dressed up as Romans and Celts. Arran age 9 told me, *"My favourite YAC activity was making the Roman curse tablet bags."* Two of our members have gone on to study archaeology at university, and one has used what he learnt with MAYA for his Duke of Edinburgh bronze, silver and gold Skills Awards. With archaeology no longer being taught in schools, Young Archaeologists Clubs like MAYA are usually the only chance children and

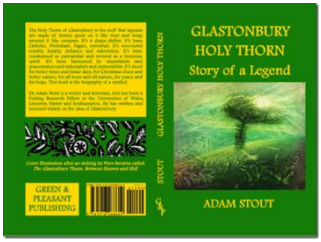
young people have to experience archaeology.

None of these wonderful opportunities would have been possible without the help and support of an amazing number of people who have helped us along the way. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the team of volunteers who help to run MAYA, plus SANHS, the South West Heritage Trust, the staff at the Museum of Somerset, Teresa Hall, Lympsham Archaeological Society for their generous donation of fieldwork equipment, and all the other people too numerous to mention who have made MAYA possible, not forgetting the inspiration behind it all – Mick Aston.

Liz Caldwell

The Glastonbury Thorn

Adam Stout has written and lectured widely on Glastonbury; he published a scholarly paper on the afterlife of the Abbey in vol. 157 of the Proceedings. He has now published the first academic study of the Glastonbury Thorn.



The Holy Thorn of Glastonbury is the stuff that myth is made from. Stories grow on this famous tree like fruit, and wrap around it like creepers. It's been Catholic, Protestant, Pagan, universal. It's succoured royalty, loyalty, defiance and subversion. It's been condemned as patriarchal and revered as a feminine spirit. It's been harnessed by imperialists and peacemakers and nationalists and universalists. It's stood for better times and better days; for Christmas cheer and better nature, for all trees and all nature, for peace and for hope. This book is the biography of a symbol.

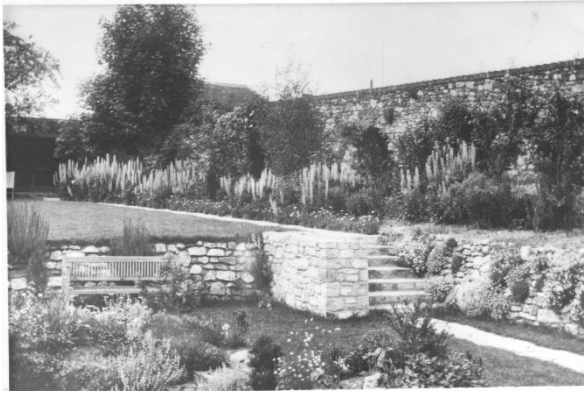
The book is published by Green & Pleasant Publishing. Available all over Glastonbury, online from Amazon or from:
green-and-pleasant-publishing.square.site

Adam Stout

Philip Radford – an Appreciation

Philip Radford was born in Somerset in August 1920. His parents later moved to Cornwall where he spent most of his childhood. He moved back to Somerset after retiring and has been very active in the Natural History section of the Society until very recently, writing incisive book reviews for the Proceedings. He contributed reports to the Newsletter over twenty years which were then put together as a book entitled 'A Naturalist's Eye - Twenty Somerset Years', and continued to do so through to last year. He led forays into the countryside which he can sadly no longer do. He was also the Society President in 2005-2006.

When Philip celebrated his 100th birthday last year we wrote and said we would like to put a bench in the Castle Gardens when they are finished with a plaque to celebrate his 100th birthday. He wrote back and said he liked the idea of the bench but didn't think he warranted a plaque.



We have identified the spot for the bench and hopefully it will be in place by end of March. Looking through some old photographs of the garden I came across one that has a bench in the same spot.

Chris Jessop

Philip's book, as described above, is still available from the SANHS website or the SANHS office (ed).

Nature in a Lockdown Garden

Mid March 2020 and all is not well, big brother, with the best of intentions, has told everyone to stay at home. So, what to do, a wander into the garden to look around, ponder the question and perhaps find the answer? All field trips are cancelled, try the garden! The title really should be 'Nature observed in a Garden during Lockdown and whilst shielding from the Corona virus' but that is a bit long even if more accurate.

The garden in question is rurally situated in the south-east corner of the county, reasonably large and surrounded by agriculturally improved rye grass dominated pasture for cattle but on the east by fields used for some family sheep. Most of the fields in the area at least have hedgerow boundaries, some unkempt, others with a short back and sides management. This garden now has mixed shrub hedgerow boundaries with trees, a herbaceous and shrub with lawn front garden and a back garden of lawn, herbaceous beds with shrubs, a pollarded willow for hanging bird feeders from, a pond and a sort of vegetable area - when time permits. There are also various seats for sitting in the sun or shade as the occasion demands. With the glorious weather this year, time availability and all the seats to take advantage of, quietly, so as not to disturb the gardener, sitting and observing the comings and goings of all that flew, ran or crawled or even grew seemed a possibility.

The first indications of spring came with the unmistakable calling of Chiffchaffs, first heard here in March but their very close relative the Willow Warbler, never, though they are common on spring passage elsewhere in the county. Late April brought the first Swallows, not to nest but to give pleasure from their twitterings on the overhead wires. May did not, this year, bring House Martins back to their nests though the Jackdaws were back in the chimney, Blue Tits and Great Tits were using their nestboxes whilst the House Sparrows were under the eaves. The other nesting garden birds just quietly disappeared into the shrubbery.

That this spring burst into life was shown by the procession of butterflies that made use of the garden, male Orange-tips and Brimstones flew

about the garden nectaring as did the Speckled Woods before going on their ways. Holly Blues I felt sure were breeding on the two female Holly bushes/small trees, as I was for the Meadow Browns and Large Skippers using the area of uncut grass, euphemistically called, 'meadow' near the pond.

The butterfly surprise of the summer though was a freshly emerged Silver-washed Fritillary which graced the garden, nectaring and sunning itself before moving on. As summer progressed Gatekeepers and the occasional Common Blue appeared whilst late summer into autumn brought a Comma and numbers of Large and Small Whites, two Small Tortoiseshells, very pleasing as I did not see any here last year, with Peacock butterflies and Red Admirals the last to appear.

One appearance in the front lawn in late spring, which was uncut to let the Cowslips set seed, was a single Pyramid Orchid flower, a surprise for everyone - where was it from (?) but a reason to do away with the green desert, or some of it! Another botanical surprise were Cowslips in full flower, appropriately in a flower bed, in the middle of August.

Pyramid Orchid with Skipper Butterfly

The presence of the bee-fly *Bombylius major* in the spring indicated good numbers of solitary bees as the bee-fly larvae parasitise the nests of these and bumblebees. It would be of help, not only to me, if they did so to wasps, which this year built their nest, football size, suspended in the Wedding-cake Viburnum and camouflaged with the bushes leaves. Apparently, gardeners concentrating on the job in hand do not notice the warning buzzing to start with, then they do! The first bumblebees that appeared, the Red-tailed and White-tailed Bumblebees conspicuously nectared on Lungwort in between quartering the garden

looking for suitable sites for their nests. Honey bees appeared in due course as did the Tree Bumblebee, a recent arrival in Somerset due to global warming. The Ivy Bee has yet to appear, although I kept checking the flowering Ivy smothering the Elderberry bushes.

Mid-summer gave me three nice surprises, the first being two separate, brilliant green Rose Chafers, a single Humming-bird Hawkmoth and at dusk when waiting to check the emergence of Pipestrelle and Brown Long-eared Bats from somewhere under the old roof, a Maybug / Cockchafer, or as known to all of a certain age, a Doodlebug droned past. Once so common, now like so much other wildlife…

Humming-bird Hawkmoth

Pond watching recorded Large Red and Common Blue Damselflies and three species of dragonfly, the Common Darter, Broad-bodied Chaser and Four-spotted Chaser. Counting the Common and Palmate Newts and the frogs at night was easy using a torch but as the summer progressed their numbers unusually decreased. Suspicions were confirmed when the Grass Snake was seen sloughing its skin on the stone edge. Not so welcome visitors to the pond were the Hornets, a recent arrival to this part of the county, collecting water for their nest which was again found to be in the new loft above the bedroom and summarily disposed of. Their presence in the loft last year was tolerated until they flew into the bedroom at night then action had to be taken and repeated this year, a not so good benefit of global warming and why is this loft so inviting?

Broad-bodied Chaser: Female

Watching the garden generally in late summer revealed Blackcaps, Whitethroats and Chiffchaffs occasionally feeding through the shrubs, fattening up before their autumn migration to warmer climes though some Chiffchaffs overwinter and can be seen in the Avalon Marshes. Our milder winters are leading to more Blackcaps being seen at garden feeders, but not here yet. The peanut feeders attract Great-spotted Woodpeckers throughout the year whilst Green Woodpeckers regularly search for ants in the lawn. The mixture of feeders attracts a range of small birds which in turn attracts Sparrowhawks, whilst Collared Doves, Jackdaws and other large birds feed on the dropped seeds below them. Whilst watching circling Buzzards, their calls announcing them, for the first time this year a lone Red Kite appeared circling over the garden. A graceful sight and a surprise as this bird is taking so long to colonise Somerset, perhaps out-competed by the now common Ravens.

Not all the time was spent just watching, work has its rewards as demonstrated by turning the compost heap in late summer when a dozen Grass Snake egg cases were found, two Slow Worms were disturbed and a Toad crawled away to hide under some nearby bricks. Good exercise and just reward. That work can provide rewards was again shown by my intention to remove the overgrown suckers of the Summer Jasmine on the front of the house. As I went to do the deed my attention was caught by the activities of a pair of Speckled Bush-crickets happy together in broad daylight(!), so I thought, 'come back another day' and put away the secateurs. Again, due to work, cutting long grass in front of the house, by my neighbour this time, a Wasp Spider, and what a magnificent spider, brightly striped black and yellow like its namesake, it builds its orb-shaped web suspended from grass stems where it hopes to catch grasshoppers. The web could be mistaken for the web of the well-known Garden Spider being much the same size and shape but it differs noticeably in the wide 'ladder' running vertically down the web, even if the spider is not to be seen. This spider, a relatively recent arrival, is sparsely distributed across South Somerset and although it occurs a mile or so away, its appearance was, so far, the surprise of the year.

Wasp Spider

Autumn's arrival was shown by the Squirrels eating the Hazel nuts and dropping the split nut cases whilst the Great-spotted Woodpeckers could be heard breaking open the nuts having first wedged them into the Elder bark. Neat, circular holes in those collected together showed the presence and activity of the Long-Tailed Fieldmouse, nice little animals, providing they stay in the garden. The local Tawny Owls have been very vocal this year announcing to one another their individual territories and no doubt listening for rustles in the grass.

The sounds of autumn moving into winter from the garden, for me, has been hearing overhead the flight calls of Meadow Pipits and Skylarks flying south-west during the day but I have yet to hear this year the night time flight calls of Redwing and Fieldfare, also flying south-west. Listening too early, perhaps, though I might have missed them, just as I miss hearing the Nightingales on a quiet spring night that used to breed in a local wood, or the Cuckoos that called from the hedgerows, day and night, or the most recent loss, the rasping wheeze of the Greenfinches. I do, however, have the pleasure of looking forward to the clown of the bird table, the Starling. Once breeding in the village its decline here is part of, unfortunately, a national decline but once the wintering flocks arrive in Somerset some will appear in the garden but I doubt if I will be sitting quietly waiting and watching in the garden for them, though I might do so from indoors by the fire.

A week or so later in early November there they were, small flocks of foraging Starlings in the adjacent fields, no doubt part of the wintering

Starling roost from the Avalon Marshes. As expected, small parties of three or four of them began feeding in the garden making occasional attempts to feed on the suspended fatballs, but never on the suspended mixed seed or peanut holders, with these they were content to find dropped seeds and peanut pieces on the ground. Starlings are day migrants, flying in their flocks from eastern and northern Europe, even southern Russia, to over winter in Britain and, as they can see each other to keep the flock together, there is no need to call at the same time. This silence is impressive when a huge flock is flying silently and low into roost in the Avalon Marshes, just the sound of the air being disturbed as the birds fly over. A different story when they land when every bird tries to make more noise than its neighbour until they settle for the night. It is the same at dawn when they start their day, all calling together until they suddenly take flight with a great 'whoosh' of wings and the silent flock sets off to forage for the day.

This behaviour is in contrast to the Redwings and Fieldfares that descended on the garden a few days later, my attention being attracted by their flight calls, the 'seep' of the Redwings and the 'chuckle' made by the Fieldfares. A dozen or so Redwings concentrated on clearing the Holly bushes of their berries, leaving none for the Christmas house decorations, whilst half a dozen Fieldfares started on the berries of the small Cotoneaster, *C.cornubia,* tree in the front garden. These two thrushes from northern Europe, even Iceland, are night migrants and use their flight calls to keep the flock together in the dark and it is these flight calls that I listen for as they pass on their way in the dark. It is only by the frequency of the calls that an appreciation of whether a large flock is passing overhead or just a small flock.

Fieldfare

Flight calls are not the only difference with the Starlings, their migratory patterns differ as well. The Starling flocks migrate annually between their home patch and Britain each year with the return of the Starlings looked forward to, as we do for the return of the Swallow, a sign that spring is on its way. Redwings and Fieldfares however have an erratic migratory pattern, visiting us one year and somewhere else in southern Europe the following winter. These movements have been found through migration studies carried out under the guidance of the British Trust for Ornithology; Redwings I recorded at a local winter roost have been found subsequently in France and Italy and one, unfortunately dead in the snow in May, on the eastern side of the Ural mountains, the most easterly known movement of a wintering Redwing from Britain (or it was in 2006). Having stripped the berries from the garden and local hedgerows these birds have now moved on, but the Starlings are still visiting the garden and should be here until middish March, depending now on our unreliable weather.

It is now late January 2021, lockdown is in place again, so still just the garden until, I hope, we are allowed to go further. A couple of days with 2-3cm. of snow, more with frosts in the morning and many cold and wet means garden watching through windows. Still, lots to see with the birds on the feeders and a surprise, a Song Thrush has appeared, so far for just the one day. The garden though is blooming with Snowdrops, Lungwort, Daffodils, Primroses, Crocus, Hellebores, Celandines and Aconites in flower, as also is Hairy Bittercress which is not welcome, let weeding commence. Up against the house wall a yellow climbing rose is blooming and the Hazels are draped with their catkins so regardless of the pandemic and lockdown, nature has not stopped and it looks like recording it in this garden hasn't either.

David Reid
January 2021

Somerset Archaeological & Natural History Society

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The SANHS office is normally open on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday & Thursday from 9am to 3pm. **However, during the current coronavirus restrictions, the office is closed, but the office manager can be contacted on 07531 898272.**