

HARPTREES HISTORY SOCIETY



NEWSLETTER No 22

October 2025

Our new season is now in full swing with the second of our talks due as this Newsletter goes out. Phil Curme will be talking on 29 October about Somerset's military coastal defences. If you have not yet reserved a seat, please email the society to see if there are still places available; info@harptreeshistorysociety.org with 'October Meeting' in the subject line. Next month Laura Beckwith will present a talk entitled 'Recent Finds from Somerset 2023'. Laura is the County's Finds Liaison Officer for the British Museum's Portable Antiquities Scheme.

As with last year we will not have a December talk. Instead, we will repeat the approach that we adopted in 2024 when we held a post-Christmas 'seasonal' meeting. On 7 January 2026 our seasonal celebration will include a talk entitled 'A Field through Time' telling the story of a parcel of land in the parishes. The normal monthly meeting will be on 28 January when Dr Jo Edwards will present a talk on Hannah More. Please note these two dates for your diary.

This Newsletter includes news from other local history societies including the newly formed Ubley History Group. We look forward to reporting on its activities in future editions of the Newsletter.

Under Snippets we include a piece on drought, very topical after this year's abnormal rainfall, and related through the dry and warm blossom period and bountiful apple harvest of 2025 to another snippet – the traditional seasonal occupation of scrumping.

Finally, we give the answer to last issue's Mystery Photo and have another picture to test your minds. This one we do not have an answer though, so your help will be much appreciated.

Editor: Nick Roberts

Review of recent HHS events

Professor Ronal Hutton – The English Civil War (September 2025)

Opening the History Society's 2025-2026 season Professor Hutton warned that the subject of his talk would not make easy listening. He proceeded to fill the air of the packed Hall with words

www.harptreeshistorysociety.org

which described confidence, loyalty, bravery, disaffection, foolishness, failure, misery, despair. Professor Hutton told of a poignant letter found, lost, and found again in a remote country house, written by a farmer to tell of the utter ruin of his land and livelihood by the demands of both sides of the civil war for supplies to arm and feed their troops. Our imaginations furnished the increasingly bleak pictures conjured up by these words as the Civil War dragged on to its weary end. The Royalists were close to victory, but a decision to split their forces and deploy some soldiers in another part of the country was a fatal one.

As always, Professor Hutton delivered his story to a captivated audience with skill and clarity and included much new material gleaned from his research. His popularity as a speaker over the years has meant that we have already booked him for next year. He will return at the start of the 2026-27 season to bring the time of Oliver Cromwell and the Protectorate to life. Be sure to book early.

News from Local Societies

Clutton's Past Comes Alive Online

Clutton's rich history is now just a click away. A new online archive - packed with over 60 pages of stories, photos, maps and interviews - brings the village's past to life at: www.Cluttonhistoryarchive.org.uk

The project, twelve months in the making, has been a local volunteer led initiative set up to share as many of Clutton's historical resources as possible and put them in one comprehensive online archive. Alan Gray, a long-term resident has created the website which has been put together with the support of villagers and the Clutton History group. The project also benefitted from a grant from the Chelwood Community fund.

The vast majority of the History group's historical material existed only in hard copy format. The aim was therefore to create an archive that could be shared widely, so anyone interested in Clutton's heritage could explore it online. The archive paints a vivid picture of village life, including coal mining, railways, school life, sport and leisure and many other aspects.

Although centred on Clutton, the archive already includes some material from neighbouring villages, reflecting Clutton's close ties with the surrounding areas. And it continues to grow. Chris Border, Secretary of the Clutton History group, views this as an ongoing project. "We're still collecting photos, documents and personal stories of residents who have lived in the village for a number of years" says Chris, "if anyone has material tucked away in an attic or a family album, we'd love to add it to the collection".

The Clutton History Archive offers a unique window into the past. For those seeking further information then please email: Chris.border@live.co.uk or ring 01761 451155

Ubley History Group

After a couple of meetings earlier in the year, the Ubley History Group was formed and, before the summer, we put together a display for the Ubley Fête. It covers some social history of the village such as the pub, the Post Office and some interesting personal stories. This drew a lot of interest and sparked some lively conversations. The display board can now be seen in St Bartholomew's Church.

Since then, further research has begun. Ronan visited the local archives in Taunton to look into the history of the bells and, more widely, the church itself. Among the finds were notes from a former rector, Revd. Albert Ennor, who arrived in April 1874, newly ordained. His father owned mines in Cornwall and the lead works at Priddy, while his brother owned Hazel Manor. His diary paints a rather bleak picture of the church at that time. It is described as being "in a truly melancholy state", with holes in the roof and water pouring into the pulpit, saplings growing in the pews, and every surface painted so many times that there was half an inch of paint in places.

He quickly set about a major restoration (ending one diary entry with the words "it is time to restore") and signed the contract for the work in September 1874.

The archives hold fascinating records of this work: the builders' quote (J & SR Gorvett of City Road, Bristol), the full specification, the signed agreement (£714), the list of donors, and the minutes of the fortnightly renovation committee. These reveal decisions such as unexpectedly rebuilding the porch completely — the old one was described as "erected entirely for convenience, certainly not for beauty as well" and "a very ugly object". Ennor also noted details of the changes, including his choice of a "warm pinkish colour" for the interior walls. The work was completed exactly 150 years ago this month.

There is still much to uncover. Many alterations have been made to the St Bartholomew's since then, not all of them recorded. For instance, we don't yet know when the current floor was laid, or how. A 1955 quote for underfloor heating survives, but it was clearly never carried out. Beyond the historical interest, piecing together this story will also help our community to care for and maintain the church in the future.

Please get in touch at ubleyhistorygroup@gmail.com if you'd like to get involved with the History Group. We are always interested in any documents, photos and stories you may have about Ubley.

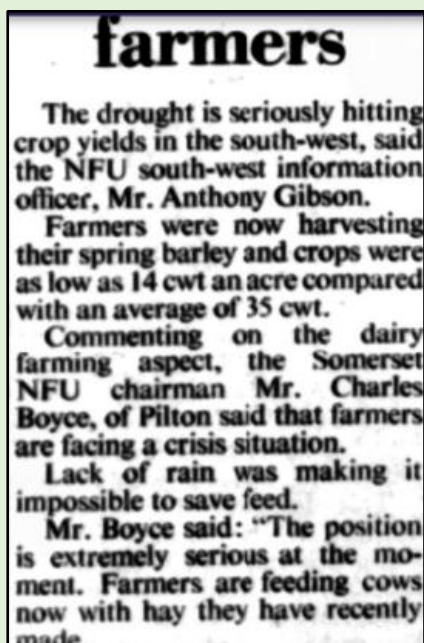
Forthcoming events

To help raise funds for the restoration of the Chew Magna's village pound, a series of talks has been arranged. The first was very popular, and there are still two more before Christmas. These are on Wednesday 5 November, when Dr Peter Guest will talk about the notable Roman centres of 'Caerleon and Caerwent' and on Wednesday 3 December, when Professor Richard Evershed will describe early life in the Chew Valley citing '**Organic residues in archaeology: The first residents and their lives**'. These talks will be held in the Millennium Hall in Chew Magna, starting at 7.30pm. Seats can be reserved by contacting rcade47@gmail.com. The cost is £5 per person per talk.

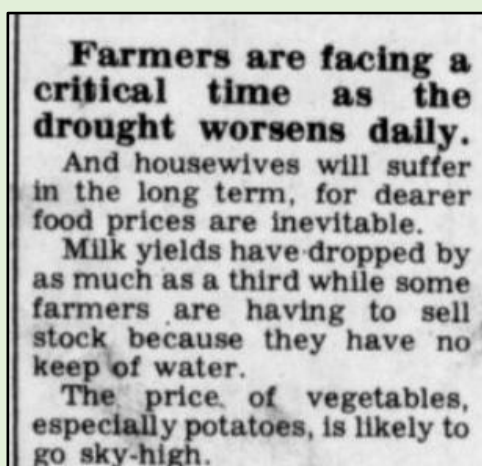
Snippets

Taking water for granted? Gill Hogarth

In 1976, the year of the great drought, my father, a farmer, seriously considered restoring his old well which had been used up to the late 1920s, but it proved too expensive. Wessex Water's chief executive, Mr Kenneth Roberts, said in August 1976 that the '*present drought was the sort that only happened once in 900 years and he's probably right.*' (*Somerset Guardian*, 20 August 1976).



Cheddar Valley Gazette 8 July 1976.



Banbury
Guardian 15
July 1976

In 1956, the installation of Chew Valley Lake was supposed to be a wonderful insurance against drought. But since then, our water consumption has risen beyond all conception.

In 1944, in East Harptree Lt Col H W Kettlewell of Harptree House reckoned that as his rain gauge was some 350 ft above sea level, it could be taken as giving a fair average for Mendip as a whole. During the period Oct-Nov 1944, he measured '*a shade under 15 ½ inches of rain, or some 1,550 tons of water per acre. On this parish of about 2,400 acres, there well have fallen, therefore, in the last two months nearly 3 ¾ tons of water or between 800 and 900 million gallons!*' He trusted that we may look forward to an adequate supply of water during the summer of 1945. (*Somerset Guardian* 8 December 1944). It would be interesting to compare that with the rainfall for the period October-November 2024.

His father, H H Kettlewell of Harptree Court, had provided East Harptree with six water pipes fed from springs on his land. In 1919, he began negotiating for Clutton District Council to take over the supply.

On 10 October 1936 according to the *Western Daily Press*, '*"nerve shattering noises"* of pneumatic drills and blasting operations at East Harptree were the subject of a complaint address to Clutton Rural Council by Col Kettlewell. However, the medical officer, Dr Brew, whilst agreeing, was quite unable to suggest any way of remedying the matter. Most villages [he] had passed were about to pass through the same experience, and so far, he had not heard of any casualties from the noise. By this time, 77% of the total mains in the original scheme had been laid and that the average number of men employed on the scheme during the month was 235.

A local resident tells me that they '*...recall Mum telling us that she remembered the water pipe being routed around the village, whilst living at Walnut Tree Cottage (Middle Street)*'.

The time before the convenience of turning on a tap is still just within living memory. People probably still have memories of having to wash in a bowl - washing down as far as possible and then washing up as far as possible, before the convenience of jumping in a shower (or using a hosepipe in the garden or to wash the car). Washing in a bowl also meant you could, and still can, empty it easily on the garden!

A question, the author (and the editor) would be glad to hear from anyone with a rain gauge who could compare modern data with that of Col Kettlewell?

NB. See Harptree History Society's publication **Before the Lake** for some memories of life before a piped water supply.

Scrumpping by Sue Emmett

To scrump: *to steal fruit such as apples from trees* (Cambridge Dictionary online)

Despite the dry weather, it's been a wonderful year for fruit. Owners of apple trees have been sharing the crop with friends and neighbours by putting boxes of fruit outside their gates. How different it was in the past!

Scrumpping was a common enough activity in rural areas in times gone by. It's easy to understand why: people were living on a tight budget and there was the fruit, just hanging on the trees. And boys (it seems it was often boys) are always hungry. Nowadays they probably just raid the kitchen.

If you look at the old maps of the villages of the Chew Valley you can see that there were large areas covered in fruit trees. In 1893, the temptation was too much for two lads from Stitching Shord Lane in Bishop Sutton, Arthur and Frank Frape, aged 16 and 14. Their father was a bootmaker and their mother, Catherine, had two younger sons to feed as well.

The owner of the apples Mr S. H. Manning, had perhaps had his suspicions and had a watch set. The lads were caught red handed, for "*Constable Cullen found the defendants in an apple tree in prosecutor's orchard at Bishop Sutton at 9 o'clock on the night of the 19th inst.*" as the Shepton Mallet Journal reported on 27th October. Presumably they were hoping not to have been caught in the dark! They were also hoping to be let off, for "*they at first made prevaricatory statements, and afterwards wanted to settle the matter.*"

Mr Manning was having none of it, for "*he had suffered considerable damage from these and similar depredations, and he wanted a stop put to it.*"

So the boys were fined 15 shillings each, plus 5s 6d costs – that's about £130 in today's money. One wonders what their mother had to say about that.

Arthur seems to have emigrated to Canada later, returning to fight with the Canadian Expeditionary Force in WWI. His criminal record presumably did not stand against him.

Frank joined the navy as a stoker, but by 1911 was also living in Toronto, with his wife and family.

Quotes sourced from www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk

What's in a Name? Some thoughts by Gill Hogarth

The 'Shire' may have overtones of the Lord of the Rings, but it is importantly historically.

Do we live in Somerset or Somersetshire? Both have been used in the past. In 1889 the newly established County Council adopted the form 'County of Somerset', and this is used now.

Today the ceremonial county of Somerset is divided into the unitary authorities of Somerset, BANES and North Somerset.

Avon was a non-metropolitan and ceremonial county in the west of England that existed between 1974 and 1996. At the time, the geography teacher at Writhlington School made much use of the fact that the boundary that divided Somerset and Avon went straight through his classroom! Most people who lived south of Bristol were glad to see the end of Avon. The unitary authorities of BANES (locals did not consider the name much of an improvement) and North Somerset were established in its place.

Each change was a massive headache for the officials who collected the taxes and ran the services.

The Saxons divided the country into convenient areas for the administration of justice and the collection of taxes. Each shire had its Shire-Reeve or Sheriff who was responsible for collecting the taxes and paying them in at the Exchequer. He was also in charge of the county prisons.

Each shire was further divided into Hundreds, for the purposes of justice, police, law, military defence, registration of land tenure and, of course for the collection of taxes. Over time, many of these became associated with the lordship of the most important manor within the hundred. From their creation in the mid-10th century, the hundreds would have been important in everyone's lives.

Ubley, Compton Martin and West Harptree came under the hundred of Chewton (Mendip) and Hinton Blewett and Bishop Sutton were part of the hundred of Chew (Magna). However East Harptree and Litton were outlying and isolated parts of Winterstoke and Wells Forum respectively.

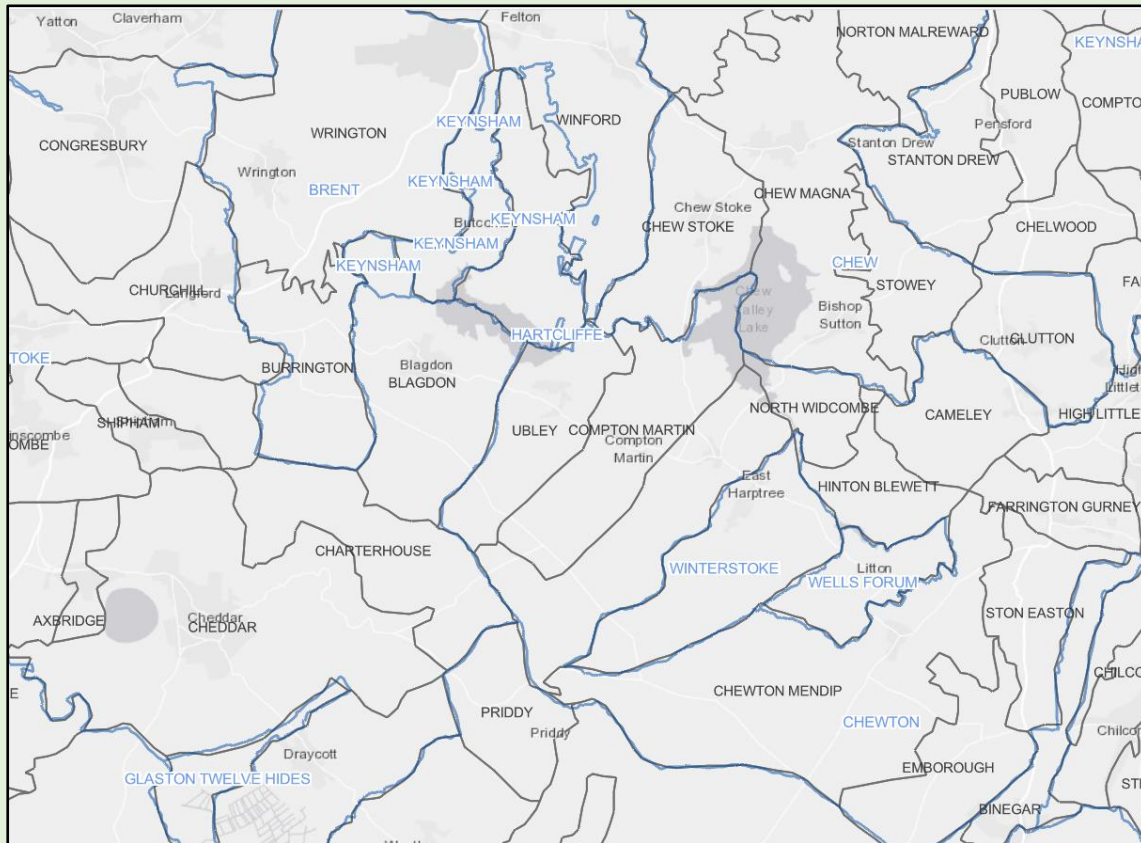
The hundred continued to be important administratively until the 19th century, when new local government legislation gradually took over its tasks.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the origin of the division into hundreds is 'exceedingly obscure, and very diverse opinions have been given as to its origin.' Was it the area which covered 100 hides of land? A hide varied in size according to the nature of the ground, but it was generally 'the amount considered adequate for the support of one free family with its dependants; at an early date defined as being as much land as could be tilled with one plough in a year.' It is often listed as being about 120 acres, but the size of an acre varied.

Hide, hiwisc' or huish has survived in several Somerset place names. 'The name Huish Episcopi is mostly thought to derive from the Old English hiwisc for lands or household and episcopi meaning belonging to the bishop, although Huish may possibly derive from the Celtic wych, pronounced ooish, for water.' A more local example is Hewish between Congresbury and Weston-Super-Mare.

If you would like to know more about the Winterstoke hundred there is a piece in the SANHS Proceedings 2010) <https://sanhs.org/wp-content/uploads/SANH-154-Thorn-Winterstoke.pdf>

The map extract, below shows the Hundreds and wapentakes in England as they were in 1831. <https://www.arcgis.com/apps/mapviewer/index.html?webmap=1de6d2bb5e794fa885c2e320c191ad17>



Mystery photo

In the last Newsletter (No 21 July), we included a photo taken during our summer visit to The M Shed, showing a large container of about 2 feet diameter. We invited readers to come up with suggestions for its identification or use.



Surprisingly we had no takers. In fact, it is a lead smelting crucible from the St Cuthbert's Lead Smelting Company at Priddy. This one was used between 1864 and 1908 but the design was likely little changed from ones used over previous centuries.

Here is another mystery photo which shows a brass monogram probably from horse-related furniture found in a field in East Harptree. The letters appear to be **M P** and **C** but not necessarily in that order. Almost certainly they represent a family or business and it probably dates from the 19th or early 20th century. We have no idea who it may represent, but perhaps you have?

