

Newsletter Number 1 of The Friends of Somerset Archives

Welcome to this the first newsletter for the Friends of Somerset Archives. At the time of writing (just before Christmas) we have already attracted 40 members, of which three are life members, so keep up the good work and remember to copy the membership application forms to as many people as possible; if you need additional copies, or you have lost your electronic copy, then please let the membership secretary know whose address is at the end. There are several important pieces of information which need to be read and actioned, so please try not to lose this amongst all of the Christmas wrapping paper, cards and presents. If you have anything to go into a future newsletter please can you either e-mail it or post it to me at your earliest convenience and my details are also at the end. The newsletter is a good opportunity for members to raise any issues that are appropriate and also to communicate with others who may not be able to get to the meetings, on which note the committee have put together the following programme for 2004.

24th of January (Monday) **Social event and a look behind the scenes at the Somerset Record Office.** Numbers are limited to 30 people only, on a first come first served basis starting at 7:30. This is a good opportunity to get to know other members of the group and some of the archivists at Taunton. If you wish to come please contact the membership secretary to make sure there is still enough room. Tea and coffee will be available.

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22nd of March (Tuesday) **Records at The National Archives for Local and Family Historians by David Hawkings.** Numbers are limited on a first come first served basis starting at 7:30 at Taunton Castle. Another opportunity to get to know other members of the group and some of the archivists at Taunton. If you wish to come please contact the membership secretary to make sure there is still enough room. Tea and coffee will be available.

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4th of June (Saturday) **Literature and Local History : Nether Stowey, Coleridge and Wordsworth by Tom Mayberry.** This event will start at 11 o'clock at Coleridge's cottage at Nether Stowey, followed by lunch for which you will have to make your own arrangements, then at 2 o'clock a tour of the village. There may be a charge for the visit to the cottage and cream teas will be available afterwards (the price for cream teas will be made at cost). Again if you wish to come please contact the membership secretary to make sure there is still enough room.

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Autumn (To be arranged for a Saturday) **Somerset Archives at Longleat House by Dr Kate Harris.** Numbers are limited so once again it will be on a first come first served basis. If you wish to come please contact the membership secretary to make sure there is still enough room. This is an excellent opportunity to examine a wealth of Somerset's history accrued by the Lords Bath over several centuries. More details will be posted as soon as they are available.

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December **Christmas Social and Quiz.** It seems a long way off but we are planning this event well in advance to make it a worthwhile outing to celebrate the first year of the Friends of Somerset Archives. More details will be posted as soon as they are available.

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If you have any ideas for any visits, talks or activities please can you let the chairman know, whose address is at the end.

Please note that non-members will be charged at £3.00 per event.

NEWS FROM SOMERSET RECORD OFFICE

EXMOOR VOICES GO WORLDWIDE

The Somerset Archive and Record Service launched an audio link on its Exmoor Oral History Archive website

(www.somerset.gov.uk/archives/exmoor). The new service brings the voices of Exmoor into homes and work places around the world.

The site features audio clips for all 78 of the contributors to the archive, with nearly 3 hours of recorded material now available on line. From Dr Mold's concern for his patients, Dick Lloyd's love of hunting and Mary Schofield's friendship with Alfred Munnings, to hard winters when Hope Bourne stored snow in cardboard boxes and Joan Smith's father trapped sparrows for the pot. It's a vivid vignette of life in the national park at the turn of the century.

Birdie Johnson, who did the original recordings, selected the audio clips from over 200 hours of material.

She says: 'The clips complement 'Reflections, life portraits of Exmoor', the book of the archive. They add another dimension to our understanding of Exmoor and highlight the special qualities of the contributors in a similar way to Mark Rattenbury's evocative portraits.'

The addition of audio to the website has been achieved with the help and technical expertise of the Somerset Record Office, who developed the site and will maintain it as part of their own service. The site, which carries summaries of the recordings and other information, is already receiving 100,000 hits a year.

Tom Mayberry, Somerset County Council's Head of Heritage, says 'Individually, these excerpts are fascinating and engrossing; taken together, they give an impression of Exmoor in a way no written record ever could. The archive as a whole is a wonderful gift to the future.'

The Exmoor Oral History Archive was produced as part of the Dulverton and District Civic Society oral history project.

For further information please contact Birdie Johnson, project consultant (Tel 01643 831379, email lifestories@cloveruk.net) or Janet Tall, Assistant County Archivist, who designed and manages the website (Tel 01823 278805).

A new archivist Mandy Marvin has also been appointed and thus the Sanford Project funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund

is underway. This will mean cataloguing a vastly wide-ranging collection of material to modern standards.

*And finally- coming soon to the Archives... On Monday 21 February 2005 we are holding an **Introduction to the Record Office: Sources for Family History day** (10.30am-5pm). This will include an introduction to archives and the Record Office by Tom, an introduction to Family History and the resources we can provide, with tours of the office and an afternoon of research with expert help on hand (places are limited to 20 ish for this so it is important to note that booking is essential and that those interested should contact me for more info or to book)*

NEW ACCESSIONS AT OBRIDGE ROAD

Sexey's school registers, 1891-1933 (printed ed of 1934) and schoolboy diary, 1916-1919, (A\CJJ).

Original notes and papers relating to the witnesses in the case of the alleged murder of Joan Turner of Chard by John Russell, 1829-1830, (A\BEN).. These are apparently interesting and a bit gruesome!

Parish additions to Farmborough, Cothelstone, Bishops Lydeard and Wick St Lawrence.

Bridgwater shipping register, 1907-1981 (A\CJH).

Business records of Easton and Johnson Ltd of Albermarle Road (A\CJC).

GROUP NEWS

Membership Renewals. For those that have signed up do not forget that your membership will run out at the end of 2005 (yes 2005!). The committee is keen to establish standing orders for membership renewals, to which end we will be sending out further details.

Membership Cards. All members will be issued with a membership card and this will be helpful at meetings to show those who are paid-up members and eligible to attend. This is not to discourage new members but to encourage people to join – non-members are welcome at events but please note there is a £3.00 fee plus any additional costs (e.g. entry fees to historic buildings, etc).

Projects. The Friends have decided to embark on a project to transcribe and database the contents of Somerset's tithe apportionments! This is a big project but technology is the key as we have three people who have volunteered to film the original records and put them on to CD-ROM. This will mean that anyone anywhere will be able to transcribe the contents on their own computers without having to travel to Taunton to see the originals. If you are interested in helping with the transcription, filming, or checking, please can you let the membership secretary know as he has volunteered to coordinate this project. Please let the membership secretary know if you know of anyone who has already transcribed any tithe apportionments as this could save a lot of time. It is hoped that the database might be available free of charge online if we can find someone to maintain and host it. There are many other projects available to be undertaken and if you would like further details please contact the project coordinator (address at end).

Committee. We are in need of a secretary and one other member for the committee. If you are interested in helping in anyway please contact the chairman for further details.

Inaugural Meeting. The following report appeared in the Somerset County Gazette (12 Nov 2004) and scratch at which sums up a very fruitful meeting.

First meeting of archive group

THE first meeting of the **Friends of Somerset Archives** group was held at the Wyndham Hall, Taunton, on November 2.

It was chaired by Ann Leamon, who outlined the aims of the group in supporting archives and collections of Somerset records were ever they might be, not just in Somerset.

This was followed by an entertaining and enlightening talk by the head of Heritage Services for Somerset County Council, Tom Mayberry, who showed many examples of Somerset records and recounted numerous entertaining stories behind the documents.

Sue Berry, senior archivist at the Somerset Record Office, rounded the evening off with a talk covering the work of volunteers at the record office and how there were lots of small projects waiting to be undertaken which to archivists would never have the resources to achieve.

Mrs Leamon encouraged those in attendance to join and support the efforts of the group in promoting the use of Somerset records.

Progress with Projects. As time progresses it is hoped that this section of the newsletter will contain details of the progress projects have made. Please keep the newsletter editor informed.

Website. If any member would like to sponsor the Web Site to help towards these costs, please contact the Chairman.

Fundraising. If you have any good ideas which will raise funds to help the aims of the group please can you contact the chairman who will welcome any suggestions that you put forward. What about a sponsor – any ideas?

Other Collections of Somerset Archives

What other Somerset archive material exists? I leave this question open to members of the group and look forward to getting some replies which I will print in the next issue of our newsletter. This may be relatively small collections in obscure places or indexes to large classes of records made available for the first time.

Researcher's Oddities

This is an opportunity for people to share interesting discoveries relating to Somerset's archival history and an appeal by the newsletter editor for information for the next edition. This section can also be used for more lighthearted matters that may come to light whilst researching, or details of web sites, publications or indexes that may be of use to members of the group.

David Hawkings writes with this story of a remarkable discovery. After many years of searching for William Hawkings of Stogumber who was said by his brother to have moved to London I was unable to find any proof of his whereabouts in the city or Westminster. After giving up hope a friend gave me details of a monumental inscription on the floor of the church at Iver in Buckinghamshire (only two miles from where I was living at the time at West Drayton, Middlesex):

'Here lieth the body of William Hawkings, Gent

Son of Nicholas Hawkings of Stogumber

In the county of Somerset, Gent . . .

Died in ye 60th yeare of his age

On the 23rd day of Nov. 1665 . . .'

Never give up hope of solving longstanding mysteries!

Contact Details

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NEWSLETTER - Please note that this newsletter has been issued with the agreement of all of the committee who have the final say on all of the material published by the Friends.

**** Don't forget that this is not only a group supporting the Somerset County Record Office but also other record offices in the historic county and also we are interested in Somerset records that are outside the county and not so easily accessible ****