

ABERGAVENNY LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY.

Newsletter No. 1. August, 1985.

The aim of this letter is to record the activities and the organization of our Society. Although just past our 8th Annual General Meeting, we have become one of the strongest and most active groups in our town. A lively committee guarantees our future and we can look forward, I'm sure, to many more annual newsletters.

Over one hundred members regularly attend winter lectures in The Angel Hotel ballroom. Although waiting lists occur for our popular summer visits only a few people are, in the end, disappointed. We welcome new members and a special invitation is extended to those who, for a variety of reasons, have 'got out of the habit' of attending our functions.

Much has been achieved in the last year. We won a British competition for 'The History Society of the Year' and were commended by the judges for the originality and variety of our activities. We received considerable publicity at the time, but much of our work is less well known. We have sponsored a Community Programme project which has restored the line of the medieval town wall at the rear of the Castle Street car park. Almost £1,200 was raised to finance permanent castle floodlighting, installed by Manpower Services.

Two major projects, the Pullan street survey and the Farley town plaques, came to a successful conclusion this summer and are briefly described later. Other sub-committees are being formed to replace them. One, to encourage the study of local history in schools in our area, should be especially rewarding. Members are always invited to assist in any of these activities. I warmly appreciate a friendly membership and the loyal support of an undivided committee.

Abergavenny Street Survey - 1979-1984.

On May 23rd this year we celebrated the winding up of the 'Project Committee' Since 1979 Cyril Feldwick, Gwyn Jones, Elaine Richards, Anna Tucker, Gwynne Walbyoff, Paddy and Malcolm Wills-Wood, and for part of the time, Freda Key, David Marples, Colin and Gill Johnson and Myra Cooper, with Howard and Beryl Pullan as Chairman and Secretary, had a most interesting time researching the properties in the main streets of Abergavenny, i.e. Cross Street, High Street, Frogmore Street, Nevill Street, Monk Street, Market Street and Flannel Street.

Our aim was to record the town as it is now and then to find out as much about its past as we could. We started by commissioning a set of colour slides to include all the properties in these streets, these are now housed in the Museum. We then visited all the shops to find out what we could about their past and present use, and talked to many old inhabitants - this led to two hilarious evenings when we tried to tape record some of their reminiscences - much fun, but little success!

We spent many hours with trade directories going back to 1822, also looking at some deeds which were most interesting; there is yet more to be found in the record office in Cwmbran by anyone who has the time and interest. We keep working copies in the Museum and they can be added to at any time, so if you have any snippets of information, or old photographs, they would be most welcome.

The photo copy of the complete project has been bound by the Archivist, and is housed in Abergavenny Library for all to see. We hope it will stimulate interest in the town so that no more valuable buildings will suffer wanton destruction.

One or two of us are working with Anna Tucker to do further research into particular properties, and anyone is most welcome to join us in this or any other project on aspects of Abergavenny that interests you. Let Gwyn Jones or Anna know if you have any ideas.

Plaques.

In 1981 a small sub-committee consisting of Peter Campbell, John Cook, Bill Farley (Chairman), Arthur Hinshelwood and Gwyn Jones, was formed to explore the feasibility of affixing ornamental, distinctive plaques to mark some of the most interesting historic sites in Abergavenny. The ten potential sites considered were the gates of the medieval town wall and some of the town's oldest remaining houses and inns. Negotiations with interested parties and local authority departments followed.

A cast aluminium twelve inch diameter plaque in Oxford blue, with a white half inch border and a super-imposed crest of Abergavenny Borough in full colour was designed. The legend in each case was brief and informative. The manufacturers were the Royal Label Factory, then of Stratford-on-Avon. The plaques cost the Society £80 each, but we were fortunate in defraying a good deal of this through the generous support of several organisations and individuals in the town. Peter Campbell and Arthur Hinshelwood undertook to fix the plaques in the chosen positions at no cost to the Society, and Peter additionally acted as the official photographer for the Society records and for press publicity and public display. In this respect we were greatly assisted by the Museum Curator, Anna Scott Tucker and her staff.

Three plaques were put up in December, 1982, three in September, 1984 and two more in April, 1985. These eight plaques mark the sites of four of the medieval town gates, Abergavenny's original grammar school, a fifteenth century town house, a former town house which was later an inn, and a late 18th century house built on the site of a tannery. One more plaque, to mark the site of the former Bull Inn, has been produced and will be put up in due course.

Summer Visits.

Our first summer visit in 1985 took us to the Dorset town of Sherborne, where the vice-president of their Local History Society guided us around the beautiful Abbey and the lovely old town.

The first of our three half day visits was to see the Saxon church and chapel at Deerhurst with Mr. Peplow as our guide. In spite of the inclement weather, Mr. Soulesby showed us around the village of Trellech which once had the second largest population in Wales. On our last half day visit we toured the Valley Inheritance Museum at Pontypool, and the Director, Mr. Babbige, conducted us around the Blaenavon Ironworks and the restored canal cottage and museum at Pontymoel.

The prize winning Gladstone working pottery museum near Stoke-on-Trent was the first stop on our weekend. After lunch a stop was made at a 15th century overshot water mill restored to working order, and at Little Moreton Hall, a 16th century half timbered 'black and white' manor house. Refreshed by a night at Alsager College, we spent all day Saturday in Chester with guided tours around the town and the Cathedral. A small problem with the coach did not spoil our visit to the old salt producing town of Nantwich on the Sunday morning, and our weekend ended at Chirk Castle, an old Marcher Fortress completed in 1310.

We look forward to our final visit in September to see the castle at Pembroke and the church and castle at Manorbier.

Floodlighting.

If you haven't seen Abergavenny Castle floodlit, take a walk over Llanfoist Bridge after dark some evening. It's quite a spectacular sight. A substantial part of the floodlighting fund consisted of personal donations from our members and fund raising by the Society. There were also generous donations by local businessmen and Abergavenny Town Council. £1221.60 has been raised - quite an achievement.

Our Chairman's wife, Mrs. Beryl Jones, (wearing a very fetching hat!) switched on the lights. Everyone at the ceremony, including the Mayor of Abergavenny and the Chairman of Monmouth District Council, had a celebratory glass of sherry and agreed that the Local History Society had done a worthwhile job.

British Association for Local History Award.

To be awarded the title of 'Local History Society of the Year' by the British Association for Local History says a great deal about the energy and enthusiasm of our members.

It was on behalf of them all that a small group attended the AGM of the BALH in London and saw our Chairman receive a cheque for £50 from Lord Briggs. Champagne and press photographs in the Castle grounds a week later further congratulated the team which had made the tape/slide presentation. Our success was marked yet again by the Chairman of Gwent County Council who kindly gave a civic reception at County Hall, where the winning entry was shown.

The prize money will be used to foster local history studies in schools in the area. It is hoped to make study packs available to teachers and perhaps provide prizes for particularly good work done in the field of local history.

Photographic Competition.

We hope that everyone has had their cameras out, shutters busily clicking, in readiness for the Society's photographic competition.

Your entry should consist of three slides of historical subjects. We are looking not so much for technical competence as for three pleasing pictures which will stimulate interest in their subjects. The slides will probably be shown at the next AGM, so would entrants please be prepared to speak briefly about their entry, or write a few words for someone else to read out? Entries, please, to the Secretary Alan Spink, by the October meeting, and prizes of £10, £5 and £2 to the winners.

Winter Lecture Programme 1985/86.

Thursday, 19th September, 1985	The Development of Railways in South Wales by Mr. R. E. Bowen.
Thursday, 17th October, 1985	The Road to Compostela by Mrs. M. O'Keefe.
Thursday, 21st November, 1985	The Message from a 15th Century Breton Rood Screen by Mr. Brian Scott.
Thursday, 19th December, 1985	Members Social evening.
Thursday, 16th January, 1986	The Abergavenny Town Project by Beryl Pullan and Anna Tucker.
Thursday, 20th February, 1986	The Dinorwic Pumped Storage Scheme to be given by a lecturer from the Central Electricity Generating Board.
Thursday, 20th March, 1986	Medieval Towns and Castles in the Abergavenny Area by Mr. Ian Soulsby.
Thursday, 17th April, 1986	The Chartist Trials by Mr. K.E.Kissack M.B.E.
Thursday, 15th May, 1986	The 9th Annual General Meeting followed by a talk on St. Mary's Church, Abergavenny by Mr. Eric Finney.

Officers.

Chairman	Mr. Gwyn Jones, 8 Belmont Crescent.	Tel. 2505
Treasurer	Mrs. Freda Key, 105 Chapel Road,	Tel. 2512
Secretary	Mr. Alan Spink, 74 Brecon Road.	Tel. 4101