



Abergavenny Local History Society



The Bloreng. Painted in acrylic by Tessa Pina (Ken Key's niece).  
Hill's tramroad runs across the cwm just above the tree line.

# NEWSLETTER No 31

## AUGUST 2015

If you are reading this newsletter in black and white, you could be reading it in colour on your computer.  
email [alhs@live.co.uk](mailto:alhs@live.co.uk) to be put on the Society's emailing list.

[www.abergavennylocalhistorysociety.org.uk](http://www.abergavennylocalhistorysociety.org.uk)

**Charity registration number 1098582**

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# PROGRAMME

**2016**

Thurs.  
10th. Sept.      **Deirdre Beddoe**  
WOMEN IN WALES AND WW1

Thurs.  
15th. Oct.      **Muriel Adams**  
ST MARY'S AND THE TREE OF JESSE

Thurs.  
19th. Nov.      **Martin Johnes**  
HISTORY OF CHRISTMAS IN WALES

December.      NO LECTURE.

Thurs.  
21st. Jan.      **Peter Walker**  
WHEN DAI BECAME TOMMY  
TUNNELLING TO VICTORY

Thurs.  
25th. Feb.      **Professor Huw Bowen**  
WALES AND THE EAST INDIA COMPANY

Thurs  
17th. March.      **Rhianydd Blebrach**  
CARTOONING THE GREAT WAR.

Thurs.  
21st April.      **Amanda Huntley**      **(Change)**  
RURAL LIFE IN SOUTH WALES ON FILM.

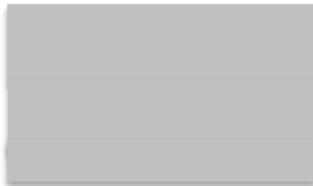
Thurs.  
19th. May.      **Christine James** Archdruid of Wales  
EISTEDDFODDAU THROUGH THE AGES  
Follows the 38<sup>th</sup> AGM.

If you have not renewed your membership, please send your subscription (£10 per person payable from 1st May) to the Membership Secretary as soon as you can so that your new card can be sent to you.

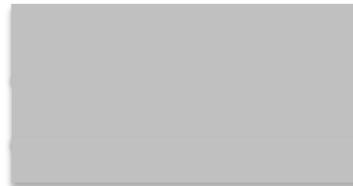
THE SOCIETY MEETS AT THE BOROUGH THEATRE AT 7.30 pm.  
**Please bring your card to all meetings.**  
Social events and visits will be publicised separately.

## CONTACTS

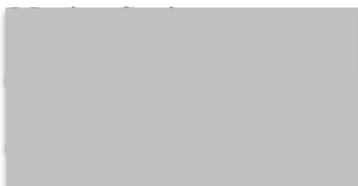
**Chair**



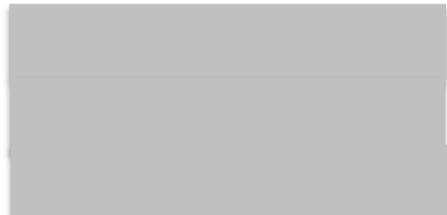
**Lecture  
Secretary**



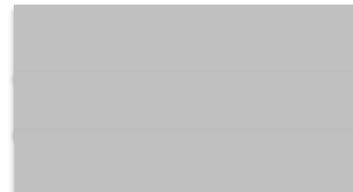
**Secretary**



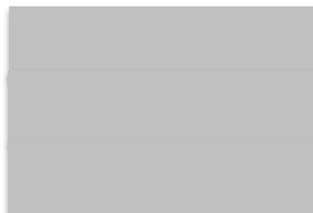
**Visits Team**



**Treasurer**



**Membership  
Secretary**



**Floodlighting  
Secretary**



**Newsletter  
Editor and  
President**



Sponsorship for castle floodlighting is £5 per week

Email: [alhs@live.co.uk](mailto:alhs@live.co.uk)

The society website is [www.abergavennylocalhistorysociety.org.uk](http://www.abergavennylocalhistorysociety.org.uk)

## BRIGADIER JOHN SKINNER'S FINAL VISIT

During the last 13 years John must have organised somewhere near 100 visits to most interesting places in various parts of the country to say nothing of the annual weekends at hotels.

He is retiring as Visits Secretary. We offer him our grateful thanks for a great deal of hard work and to his wife Sonia who has supported him in his efforts.



His final visit was to his Alma Mater, Queens College Oxford. Queen Philippa, the Belgian wife of Edward III founded the college in 1741. John enlisted the help of Dr. Linda Irving Bell, the college Home Bursar. We enjoyed a conducted tour, visiting the library and various places not normally open to the public. Both she and John are immensely proud of Queens and John noticed many modern improvements which have taken place since his time there.

John, naturally, has an intimate knowledge of Oxford which is packed full of beautiful and interesting buildings. He took us to New College to see the reredos in the chapel. This was destroyed in the reformation and its many niches covered over. These were uncovered and looked bare after a restoration by Gilbert Scott. The many statues were remade and reinstated in 1888. The chapel was dark and photography forbidden but there are some good images on the internet.



We also visited Merton College with its impressive chapel window and its immense dining hall.

Finally we queued to visit Christchurch College. Everything here appeared to be on a large scale. The Tom Quad is an enormous grassed space and the college incorporates Christchurch Cathedral.

We shall miss John and the detailed talks on the bus about what we were about to see. There are reports of other visits later in this newsletter.

**KEN KEY**

## **CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2014-15**

I would like to thank the committee and all the other volunteers from the society who have worked hard during the year. Regretfully for us, Oliver Russell is standing down as Treasurer. We have been very fortunate that he stepped in to help us when we were unable to find a treasurer five years ago. He has simplified the accounts and made them easier to understand, supplied the committee with monthly financial reports, given the trustees advice on financial matters, and done all the necessary work for the Charity Commission. We are very grateful to him for all his hard work and will miss his excellent advice. Alan Stone has again helped with Gift Aid and we are sorry that he is unable to continue on the committee. Marian Senior has risen to the challenge for recording the minutes and all the other jobs that the secretary does, especially in organising the AGM. Helen Morgan has continued to supply articles promoting ALHS for Abergavenny Focus as well as seeking out new speakers as lecture secretary.

Dai Morgan has assisted me as Deputy Chairman, particularly necessary in a year when I had my leg in plaster. We have had good support from the technical staff of the Borough Theatre, helping Ken Key, Robert Bender and myself to operate the audio-visual aids. Jane White and Jeanette Butt provide Fairtrade tea and coffee after lectures. Jane White continues to pursue the aim of adding to the ceramic plaques around the town.

We are saying farewell to John Skinner as the Visits Organiser after twelve years. Members have enjoyed visiting the many and varied places to which he has so ably organised visits with his well known efficiency and military precision. Diane Bevan is also resigning as the Visits Administrator having had a busy and demanding job. They will complete the visits for this summer and we thank them for their efforts. We also thank the other guides who are taking the visits this year, Richard Davies, David and Barbara Powell, and Frank Olding, as well as Patricia Cane who has helped with paperwork. Dai Morgan and Caroline Fairclough will take over leading the visits team.

The society had 360 members at the end of April and we are very grateful to our efficient Membership Secretary, Sue Smith. She and her husband David save ALHS a lot by delivering membership cards and newsletters by hand. David has also stepped in to operate the projector when neither Robert Bender nor I can do it. Janet Patrick has offered to assist with the membership secretary role.

Sue Smith also co-ordinates the Research Group. I would like to thank the volunteers who include Sue Smith, Lavinia O'Brien, Chris Turvey, Bianca Emberson, Carol Foster-Davies, Janet Constable, Judy Phipps, Marian Senior and Gill Wakley. We are continuing to work on updating the street survey, which will be put onto a searchable website linked to our own website which Carol's husband, George, is organising. We have completed the transcription of Abergavenny Vestry book from 1704 to 1820 and are now trying to fill in some of the missing information on that period that the transcription revealed. A new project of recording the Old Hereford Road cemetery is now under way. We are collecting information about Gunter House which we are very pleased to hear is to be bought by the Welsh Georgian Society to conserve it. The ALHS website [www.abergavennylocalhistorysociety.org.uk](http://www.abergavennylocalhistorysociety.org.uk) continues to develop, and Sue Smith, Helen Morgan and I endeavour to keep it up to date.

Hazel Buchanan is now ably managing the Floodlighting, making sure that the electrician clears out all the vegetation after the summer and that the floodlights are correctly programmed to switch on and off, as well as taking your dedications. Paddy Beynon, despite leaving the committee, continues to maintain the Victorian garden in the Castle grounds with the help of volunteers Carolyne Watkins and Lavinia O'Brien.

Rebecca Barker is managing the Publications. We have published a new illustrated booklet *Hell Let Loose: The Third Monmouthshire Regiment in World War I* written by Frank Olding. Our previous publication, Frank Olding's *Discovering Abergavenny: Archaeology and History*, has sold well and *Gobannium: The Romans in Abergavenny* is also still available. *Charcoal Burning in Fforest Coalpit & the Grwyne Valley* by Shirley Rippin is on sale too. Books are available at membership prices before lectures in the foyer or from local outlets.

We are supporting the Abergavenny Eisteddfod again this year with a donation and I hope that our members will support the event by attending. Next year will see Abergavenny hosting the National Eisteddfod and fund raising is well under way for that. ALHS presented Levi Turner from King Henry VIII<sup>th</sup> School with £250 towards her books and computer expenses as she started studying Modern History at Exeter University and we have recently received a letter from her saying how much she is enjoying her studies.

Jane White led a group of blue badge guides from Ludlow around Abergavenny and I led walks for the patients of Nevill Hall Occupational Therapy Unit. I have attended a lot of meetings on behalf of ALHS, many of them in response to the possible reduction of local services, including changes to the Museum service. Gwent Local History Council (to which ALHS has belonged for many years) has amalgamated with Gwent County History Association. It will support the Gwent Local History Journal, an important publication for articles recording local research.

Rachael Rogers has continued to give us reports on the activities at Abergavenny Museum and on the enormous amount of work that she does promoting the Museum and looking for innovative ways to use the Castle grounds and Museum. As many of you know, this Society grew out the efforts of a small number of people, passionate about local history, who set up the Museum in 1959. The original Friends of Abergavenny Museum managed to save the Hunting Lodge from demolition and raised funds to create the Museum. In 1971, it was handed over to the Town Council (and later to Monmouthshire County Council). The Friends of the Museum group decided to form the Abergavenny Local History Society in 1977. Freda Key, the wife of Ken Key, our President, was the first treasurer, with Gwyn Jones as Chairman. Now things are coming full circle and I hope that many of you will join the (new) Friends of Monmouthshire Museums, to ensure that our Museums continue. ALHS has supported the Museum with a donation of £1,000 towards an improved presentation of its archaeology collection and the setting up of a time exchange scheme to increase the use of the Castle grounds and museum.

The newsletter will publish this chairman's report, but Ken Key would like articles and photographs to fill the rest of it – please let him have any contributions as soon as you can. Last year's newsletter was particularly well illustrated and had some excellent short articles as well. You receive it in colour if we have your correct email address as well as a monthly information list of historical events nearby, collated by Sue Smith.

ALHS is run by a small group of enthusiastic people. If you would like to join the committee or assist with any of our projects please let us know – many hands make light work.

**GILL WAKLEY** *Chairman May 2015*

## THE WEATHER AND THE POOR RATE

The vestry book for Abergavenny covers the time from 1707 to 1804. At this time, the parish vestry was running the town because the town had lost its charter - its officials did not swear the oath of allegiance to William and Mary. The vestry book contains the minutes of the vestry meetings at which the business of the town were discussed and decided - the market, the lighting (such as it was), collection of rubbish, repair of the streets and the bridges. A major part of the vestry responsibilities was looking after the poor, setting the poor rate, appointing overseers of the poor and making the provision for their care.

The weather is one variable that might have affected the number of people receiving poor relief and the level at which the poor rate that was set. The weather would affect harvests, the price of food and the work that the working man (and woman) could find. At that time it would be unusual for a labourer or other working man to obtain work continuously throughout the year and adverse winter weather or wet summers would affect whether he and his family had enough to eat, or had to appeal to the poor relief for support.

It was difficult to discover the weather patterns for Abergavenny. Although recording the weather was often regarded as part of the growing scientific interest in the eighteenth century, there are no convenient diaries to consult for this area. However, where severe weather in Wales, or the South West of England, is recorded, it is reasonable to suppose that conditions would be widespread, and events such as violent storms are well documented.

Reverend Thomas Heberden kept records of temperature and pressure in Devon from 1780 to his death in 1843, and he included records kept by his father from Windsor and Pall Mall in London. Samuel Milford was a banker in Exeter and kept a weather diary from 1755 to 1775. His notes are brief, for example, he records the severe storm in 1760 written about by several observers across Southern Britain, as "A Great Storm with Thunder, Lightning and Hail".

Samuel Pool, a dyer, also in Exeter, kept a journal from 1754 to 1815 which included details of the weather and its significance to his business. Records from the London area are easier to find, but perhaps less relevant, and ship's logs, recently transcribed and on-line, show great attention to the weather, as might be expected, but it is difficult to know how relevant the recordings off the coast of Wales or South-west England are to the weather inland at Abergavenny.

A Dr Hughes living in Stroud kept daily temperature recordings, but these appear to have been made in "a cool room" and others in the Midlands recorded temperatures on thermometers which had their own calibration.

Generalising from records from different parts of Southern England and Wales, the 1600s appear to have been very cold, with many records of the Thames freezing over (it was wider and shallower with bridges impeding its flow) and the following century appears very similar.

In November 1703, there was a great storm about which Daniel Defoe wrote, beginning his writing career after leaving a debtor's prison. A deep depression swept across Ireland, Wales and central England and possibly started as a hurricane recorded off the coast of Florida a few days previously. A tidal surge drove up the Bristol Channel and left the port of Bristol in ruins and much of the lower lying land around the Bristol Channel was inundated.

There are reports of structural damage; large losses of standing timber (as we remember in 1987) and the price of tiles went up after the event.

As I looked through the records, it became quite monotonous. 1739 -40: a severe winter, one of the worst, easterly gales bringing cold air over all the country. Rivers were frozen (imagine getting your water from the well in these conditions!) and the snow and ice made travelling hazardous. Every two or three years (sometimes every year), the entries are similar, for example, 1748: severe frosts; 1749: severe frosts; 1762 - 73: snow fell early, in late October, and severe frosts persisted throughout Christmas and January; 1765-66: severe frosts, snow fell from November until February.

In 1783-84 and 1784-85 the winters were exceptionally severe with snow falling in October, thought to be the effect of an Iceland volcanic eruption (Laki), which decimated population, crops and animals there. A yellowish cast to the colour of the air and dust particles brought alarm and apprehension, which were not confined, to the illiterate. The British government, fearing a plague outbreak, drew up plans to close the ports to traffic from the continent. Nor were popular fears mere superstition as parish registers show a spike in the number of deaths during July and August 1783, although summer is normally the time of lowest mortality in agricultural societies. It is estimated that around 23,000 more people died in Britain than would have been expected that year, doubling the normal death toll. Unusually, the deaths included young men and women working in the fields, breathing polluted air in stifling heat. The Thames froze in September and snowdrifts on the hills lasted from that winter until July the following year.

Again, in 1794-95, another exceptionally severe winter was recorded. Throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century, most of the winters were dominated by Easterly airflows.

Going into the nineteenth century, little changed. The winter of 1813-1814 was one of the coldest (although not quite as cold as recorded temperatures in 1962-3!) and fog was a problem, causing difficult or abandoned journeys. The year of 1816 was known as the "year without summer". A volcanic eruption (Tambora, East Indies) disrupted air patterns and depressions tracked much further south than usual

So it was impossible to find any correlation between the weather and the poor rate. The weather was almost always much, much, worse than we are used to today. Many people of the poorer sort, without heating or sufficient food, must just have starved or were frozen to death, or died from minor or major illness because of their debilitated condition. No wonder that by 1834, when the Union Workhouse was introduced, this was seen as a solution to the problem of the poor by those who were better off and not living in such precarious situations.

## GILL WAKLEY

### LOCAL HISTORY IN MOUNT STREET



## THE MILL STREET WORKHOUSE

The 1601 Act for the Relief of the Poor established the principle of better-off parishioners providing for those unable to work by contributing to a Poor Rate. The relief was collected and distributed by the overseers of the poor. By the eighteenth century the Poor Rate was a heavy burden on many parishes. The poor might be paid a weekly allowance (outdoor relief), or they could be housed together in a workhouse or 'farmed out' to an individual who was paid to maintain the poor but who could benefit from the products of their labour. Abergavenny tried all these methods in the period up to the opening of the new workhouse in 1837, and much of this was recorded in the St Mary's Church Vestry minute books (*Gwent Archives* D874.92 & D874.93).

On 6 November 1761 a parish meeting was held in Abergavenny where it was agreed that John Stiff and Thomas Gamage should become the governors of the "intended Hospital and Workhouse". They were to receive £200 a year, paid in quarterly instalments, for three years starting in April the following year. For this money they would ensure that the poor of the town "that shall be brought in the said Hospital and workhouse" were maintained, educated and clothed. Before this time the parish records had been full of individual payments to the poor and there could be as many as 70 people on the list. This must have meant very time-consuming administration as well as an expense that meant frequent resort to raising the poor rate. Stiff and Gamage took out a lease on the building in Mill Street which was previously the Three Tuns public house. They were given £40 before the end of December to buy furniture, bedding and utensils, but were not to receive the quarterly payments until they had actually set up a Workhouse and equipped it. On 14 December another parish meeting agreed that they should receive 40 shillings a year in addition to the £200 already allocated. No further mention was made of the "Hospital" but surgeons or physicians were called upon when needed.

By the time that John Stiff and Thomas Gamage were reaching the end of their tenure the Vestry must have decided that this was not the most advantageous system. At a meeting held on 27 September 1764 it was agreed that James and Anne Powell of Llanover were to take over the workhouse from the following January for a period of one year for a salary of £20. Each party would have the right to end the agreement at one month's notice. A meeting on 31 December agreed to pay Stiff and Gamage five guineas for the "furnace" (probably a cooking stove) at the workhouse and an agreement was made with Mrs Joan Morgan, the owner, for the rent of the Three Tuns building for seven years, renewable for ten pounds ten shillings, "clear of all taxes whatsoever". In January it was agreed that Mr Powell could have one of his children with him at the workhouse if he paid one pound, ten shillings for the privilege, but that one child could be exchanged for another if he wanted, so long as only one child was staying there.

At this time it appears that there had indeed been some problems with John Stiff and Thomas Gamage as a meeting agreed that if they sued the Overseers of the Poor for five pounds, five shillings then the parish would support the expenses incurred in fighting the action. This was because the Overseers were withholding the money owed for the furnace until the condition of the Workhouse was made good. (The matter seems to have rumbled on until 9 April 1767 when the parish agreed that Stiff and Gamage should be allowed not to pay their poor tax for 1765 and 1766, a sum of four pounds, ten shillings and three pence, in "full satisfaction" of the five pounds, five shillings which they felt they were owed.)

The management of the workhouse appears to have continued without significant problems through 1765, apart from some issues with wheat and beer, and the agreement with the Powells must have been renewed for 1766. But on 24 December 1766 it was "Ordered that if Anne Lewis does not Appear on Friday fortnight at the said Workhouse and Conform to the rules of the said house then her Weekly pay to Cease from that time." So it would appear that following the departure of Stiff and Gamage the parish had returned to giving the poor weekly allowances, instead of paying all the money to the governors of the workhouse. At the same meeting the Overseers were ordered to inspect the workhouse, check the utensils and furniture and to discharge the governors. In February 1767 it was agreed that Anne Lewis and Mary Philpott were to become the new governors of the workhouse for a salary of five pounds a year each, paid quarterly. This was significantly less than the £20 that the Powells had received. What we cannot know is whether this was the same Anne Lewis who was ordered to conform to the workhouse rules a few weeks earlier, but the arrangement appears to have continued until 1769 when, on 17 April a parish meeting agreed that the Workhouse should be dissolved and the poor given a weekly allowance.

On 24 April it was agreed that the first of the poor should be discharged from the workhouse. Jennet Jenkins, Mary Powell and two children, Mary Lewis, John Osland "an Idiot" and John Davies alias Cook were all to go the

following morning and be given weekly amounts of between one shilling and sixpence and two shillings and sixpence. Over the next few days more people were discharged from the workhouse to a total of 21 adults and 11 children receiving weekly payments of from 1 shilling to 4 shillings each. In September 1771 Mrs Morgan was paid £24 for putting the workhouse in proper repair. The furnace and other workhouse equipment were put up for sale.

Abergavenny appears to have managed without a workhouse until 1779 when a new lease was taken out with Mrs Morgan for the workhouse for a term of fourteen years. The next governor of the workhouse to be mentioned is John Cawthorne. He had been in office for an unknown period of time when he was offered a new agreement using the farming out method where the governor was paid a certain amount weekly according to the number of paupers in their care.

In June 1786 John Cawthorne agreed to look after 48 poor people at a rate of 2 shillings a head per week for a term of three months. He was given £20 immediately and was expected to provide sureties. All the poor were to receive a change of clothing which was to be returned in good condition to the workhouse. John Cawthorne's tenure lasted for a year as in February 1787 he was replaced by George Jarvis of Hay who agreed to a tenure of 3 years at a rate of 2 shilling per pauper a week. There were then 65 paupers in his care. George Jarvis died a few months into this agreement but his widow Elizabeth continued caring for the poor for 24 weeks until a replacement was found. Mrs Jarvis was paid 3 shilling a week for her services but also given £1 13s (making a total of 5 guineas) as a gratuity for her "care and attention and trouble in inspecting the distribution of the victuals and other necessaries to the poor".

In October 1788 Mr Thomas Leonard, a butcher, agreed to take on 40 paupers at 2s 5d a head per week for one year. He was to "provide them with sufficient meat drink and every other necessary for the support relief and maintenance of the poor and the support to be good and wholesome of the kind and to be subject to inspection of the parishioners". The agreement with Thomas Leonard was renewed the following year, but in July 1790 the Vestry unanimously agreed "after mature deliberation that the great expense attending the maintenance and support of the poor of the town has increased to a most enormous and alarming degree" that they would abolish the Workhouse and return to the system of paying weekly sums to the poor. The lease on the Three Tuns building ran out in May 1793 and the Vestry made arrangements with the owners, Mrs Joan Morgan and Mr Thomas Lewis, surgeon (who was probably her son-in-law) to purchase the building for £330 so it could be used again as a workhouse. The building appears to have been subdivided and was at this time occupied by Mr Thomas and Mrs Mary Jones. Mr Jones was still occupying part of the building in 1796 when he fell into arrears of rent and was given notice to quite.

Apart from a matter of four fitches of bacon which had been sent to the Workhouse and were ordered by the Vestry to be returned, little happened until In January 1806 it was decided that the next governor of the workhouse should also be a "standing" or "acting" Overseer of the Poor and that sealed proposals for the post should be sent to the Workhouse on Easter Monday. John Evans was installed in office and was such a success that a year later he was presented with £5 as a reward for his faithful services during the past year. The £5 bonus was presented to him again in 1808 and he remained in post until 1819.

From 1781 to 1809 the Workhouse had been used for Vestry meetings, but then the meetings went back to being held in one of the local inns if they were not held in the Vestry Room itself. A licence on the Three Tuns premises was granted to Thomas Newman by the Town Commissioners in 1815 so the workhouse must have remained subdivided.. Thomas Bath was publican there from 1822-1830, William Davies was publican in 1835 and William True from 1839-42 (Frank Olding. *Abergavenny Pubs*).

In 1819 the Vestry ordered that notices be put in the Gloucester and Hereford journals advertising for a new Governor of the Workhouse. Charles Madox was elected on 12 March and it can probably be assumed that he remained in post until September 1833 when the Vestry elected Richard Cross to be the new Governor and Assistant Overseer. He was to have a salary of £30 a year, paid quarterly, and he and his wife were to be maintained in the workhouse "as heretofore usual". He also had to have the agreement of two people, Richard Morgan and William True, to act as sureties for the sum of £200. Morgan and True may well have regretted the day they agreed to act as sureties because in 1836 it came to light that the accounts for the year ending 25 March 1835 had a shortfall of £189 9s 11d. A meeting was held to decide whether Richard Cross should be discharged, but he was only discharged as overseer and kept on a governor of the workhouse until the new Workhouse was built. Richard Cross was to be prosecuted at the next Assizes and he and his sureties were pursued for the shortfall. Richard Morgan made an agreement with the Vestry to pay £50 and William True to pay £20. Richard Cross agreed to pay £50 in quarterly instalments which probably meant that his prosecution was not pursued.

Then in 1838 it was “resolved that it is expedient for Richard Cross to continue as assistant Overseer” and that the overseer would have the responsibility of collecting the Poor Rate and transacting all other business relating to the duty of overseer of the poor. By this time the Abergavenny Poor Law Union had been set up.

The old Workhouse in Mill Street was sold and in 1842 the money put towards the cost of the new Workhouse. The Three Tuns Inn was later renamed the Castle Stores Inn though it continued to be known to locals as the Three Tuns until well into the twentieth century.



The Castle Stores Inn pictured in 1912

**SUE SMITH**

### **SUMMER VISITS 2016**

The new Visits Team has planned a series of five visits for next summer. We are experimenting with differing lengths of trips, and there are no crippling early starts. The Swansea and Newport visits will follow up on lectures from recent years.

On May 24<sup>th</sup> we will visit Llanelly House in Llanelli, home for much of the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century of the Stepney family. Built in 1714 (incorporating a 17<sup>th</sup> century house), it degenerated into shops and tenements when the family moved on. It has been restored and opened to the public in October 2013. This visit will be followed by lunch at the Waterfront Museum in Swansea and a river trip on the Tawe to view the remains of the industries – copper, tinplate, pottery and porcelain that made Swansea the first industrial town in Britain.

The weekend away will be to North Wales from June 10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup>, and will largely focus on Early Modern Wales. We will be based in Llandudno, and there will be visits to the medieval walled town of Conwy (‘one of Europe’s finest’), to Gwydir Castle and, possibly, Bodnant gardens. Time at Conwy will include a guided visit to Plas Mawr, the extraordinary town house built for Robert Wynn between 1576 and 1585. Gwydir Castle is a fortified manor house of the late 15<sup>th</sup> century, extended and improved during the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In the 1570s it was the home of Kathryn of Berain ‘Mam Cymru’. For an account of its recent history and restoration, Judy Corbett’s book *Castles in the Air* (Ebury Press, 2005) is available from the library and online bookshops.

The tour will take in some smaller 17<sup>th</sup> century gems including the extraordinary Rug (or Rhug) Chapel near Corwen, and the Gwydir Chapel at St Grwst’s Church, Llanrwst (which contains the empty stone sarcophagus of Llewelyn Fawr). We shall also visit Beddgelert on the way home to reflect on myth and the growth of early Welsh tourism.

On July 6<sup>th</sup> we will visit Newport, to see the Newport Ship and the Transporter Bridge, with guided tours to both. This will be midday departure, with National Trust tea at Tredegar house before we come home.

A visit to Bristol, to see Isambard Kingdom Brunel’s revolutionary ship SS Great Britain, follows on August 16<sup>th</sup>. There will be a tour of the ship, and time to explore the other attractions in the Dockyard, before visiting Red Lodge, a Tudor merchant’s house with one of the most complete rooms of the period to survive.

Finally, Frank Olding’s outing will be on September 6<sup>th</sup>, and will be a day-time event to explore the industrial archaeology of Gelligroes and Gelligaer. It will include coffee at Llancaiach Fawr, and a pub lunch.

Full details of the visits will be available in September. Bookings open in January 2016, on a first come, first serve basis. Friends are welcome, but please remember that they need to join ALHS on a £5 half-year subscription so that they are covered by insurance. If visits are oversubscribed, members will be given priority. We look forward to your joining us.

**CAROLINE FAIRCLOUGH & DAI MORGAN**

## WORKING GROUP AT OLD HEREFORD ROAD CEMETERY



Seven of us volunteered to help clear some of the brambles and weeds which had overtaken many of the graves in the middle of the Old Hereford Road cemetery last Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> July. Two of us had petrol strimmers and the rest secateurs to clear a patch in the middle of the ground which had covered at least 20 graves during the last decade or so.

The cemetery itself is quite large, approximately 4 acres and in the last 6 months a few of us from the Research Group have been transcribing details from headstones and taking photographs of them in order to retain the information for posterity.

There were some interesting graves there, including a very large pink granite obelisk which after a few hours hard graft was revealed as the last resting place of a Mr John Astbury (1836- 1872). He was from Staffordshire originally but had died in Abergavenny.

Further research revealed that his family had been potters from Staffordshire and in the 1871 census his occupation was listed as Earthen Ware Dealer, who lived in Market Street Abergavenny. His family must have done quite well to erect one of the most ostentatious headstones in the cemetery.

There were other headstones revealed including one of Ezekiel and Ann Watkins, parents to William Henry Watkins, a British soldier killed at Isandlwana during the Zulu wars. His name had been added at the bottom of the stone. I was able to send the details to someone who had written to the ALHS requesting any information and at last we were able to take a photo of the grave that had been covered up for at least 10 years. A happy customer!



We will continue to research the headstones and hopefully uncover some more interesting graves with the help of some members who were willing to give up a few hours of their time.

With thanks to Sue and Larry Thomas, Sue and David Smith, Bianca Emberson, George and Carol Foster and Marian Senior.

**CAROL DAVIES FOSTER**

### IT'S THE THIRD THURSDAY ... ISN'T IT?

Well it is, except when it isn't. Most lectures do take place on the third Thursday of the month, but a number no longer do so. The first of the new season is the first exception. Deirdre Beddoe's talk about Women in Wales in World War I will take place on September 10, i.e. the Second Thursday. The reason, as in most years, is so to avoid a clash with the Food Festival. We also have to give way to AAODS and, although, it will not affect Muriel Adams's talk on St Mary's and the Tree of Jesse on October 15 this year, it will make a big difference to our schedule next year. The other exception to the third Thursday custom in the coming season is next February when Prof Huw Bowen will talk about Wales and the East India Company on the 25<sup>th</sup>, i.e. the Fourth Thursday of the month. Tip to the wise: put the dates on your calendar or diary before you forget!

**HELEN MORGAN**

## **DAMP DAYS IN DORSET**

The weather was most unkind to us but what might have been a disaster was saved by John Skinner's planning, organisation and choice of sites and the skill of Paul, our driver.



Our first stop was at Maiden Castle, probably the largest hill fort in Europe. Water streamed down the muddy path but several of us paddled to the top.

We lunched in Dawlish and many of us walked to see Lulworth Cove. The sea had made a small entrance



through a hard rocky barrier and the radiating waves had eroded the softer rocks behind to form a circular cove.



Porters at the Suncliff Hotel in Bournemouth carried our bags from the bus to our rooms which made a great impression. However, in my room it would have been difficult to swing even a kitten! Paint was peeling and on a clear day the sea was only just visible at the end of the narrow space between hotels. All was forgiven by the high standard of the food, the helpfulness of the staff and the swimming pool and sauna.

On Saturday the sun came out at Kingston Lacy, a sizeable palace filled from top to bottom with incredible things. Many of the hundreds of paintings had been cleaned to restore their glory and the exhibition of Egyptian artefacts was most striking.



We lunched at Wimbourne at a flowery pub, The Green Man, and enjoyed the tranquility of the Minster.



River Piddle runs below the middle bank. These 'WALLS' were originally twice their present height and must have been more impressive than many hill forts. One corner of the site is called The Bowling Green. It is far from flat or level! Unfortunately, the Saxon church was closed as was the parish church (on a Sunday!). Several of us walked the Walls, returning to the bus like drowned rats and it was decided to give Corfe Castle a miss and return to the hotel.



On Monday we found the museum in Devizes something of



which the town should be very proud. A great variety of things was expertly displayed on several floors and many of us left lunch rather late. It seems a



characteristic of the area that pubs do not serve food but we were so well fed at the hotel that it did not seem to matter.

We glimpsed Stonehenge and stopped at Avebury where some of us went round the ring of great stones.

We covered a considerable distance over the weekend and were surprised to be returning as far east as Gloucester

**KEY KEY**

## MORE SUMMER VISITS 2015 FONMON CASTLE



We were lucky to have the owner of the castle, Sir Brooke Boothby to tell us all about his home that has origins around 1090, was built in stone around 1200 and has since had many alterations and additions. Sir Brooke gave a most interesting talk about the people who had lived in the castle. The principal room runs from the front to the back of the castle and is popular for weddings. Sir Brooke is rightly proud of the extensive gardens that really deserve a longer visit.

### St DONAT'S



We have also visited the 11<sup>th</sup> century church of St Donat's in the shadow of St Donat's Castle. The font is Norman but the windows are Victorian together with a recent 'Millennium' Window.

### WROXETER



This is a Roman town (Viroconium) near Shrewsbury on the Watling Street near the River Severn. There is a large wall known as the 'Old Work'. There are foundations of a basilica and also a bath house and hypocaust. There is also an interesting recreation of a typical Roman house. It is the 4<sup>th</sup> largest Roman city in Britain and it is surprising that it was only discovered in 1975.

**KEN KEY**