



Abergavenny Local History Society



# NEWSLETTER No 35

## AUGUST 2019

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

## PROGRAMME

<b>2019</b>	
Wed. 18th Sept.	<b>Mark Davis</b> DROVING THROUGH THE BRECON BEACONS
Wed. 2nd Oct.	<b>Steve Thompson</b> THE GREATEST GOOD FOR THE GREATEST NUMBER
Wed. 13th Nov.	<b>Rhianydd Biebrach</b> UNEARTHING MONMOUTHSHIRE TREASURES

**LECTURES IN 2019/2020 ARE IN THE BOROUGH  
THEATRE  
at 7.30pm.**

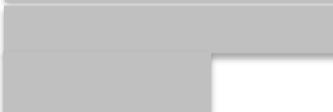
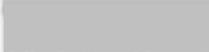
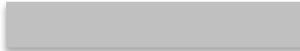
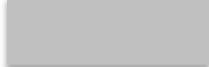
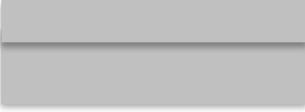
PLEASE BRING YOUR CARD TO ALL MEETINGS

YOUR 2020-21 SUBSCRIPTION WILL BE £15, PAYABLE  
ON 1st SEPTEMBER 2020

<b>2020</b>	
Wed. 15th Jan.	<b>Brian Davies</b> WILLIAM EDWARDS THE WELSH BRIDGE BUILDING PIONEER
Wed. 5th. Feb.	<b>Joe England</b> THE ROLLERCOASTER VALLEYS
Wed. 4th. March	<b>Bleddyn Penny</b> HOW IRON AND STEEL FORGED EBBW VALE'S FORTUNES
Wed. 1st April	<b>Christopher Parry</b> MEGAN WATTS HUGHES, THE VOCAL PIONEER FROM DOWLAIS
Wed. 6 <sup>th</sup> May	<b>Frank Olding</b> THE HIDDEN LANDSCAPE OF CWM CELYN (Blaina) (follows the A.G.M.)
Wed. 9 <sup>th</sup> Sept. (Not on your membership card)	<b>David Austin</b> STRATA FLORIDA. THE STORY OF AN ANCIENT PLACE IN THE WELSH LANDSCAPE.

Social events and visits will be publicised separately.

## CONTACTS

<b>Chair</b>		<b>Lecture and Visits Team</b>	
<b>Secretary</b>			
<b>Assistant Secretary</b>			
<b>Treasurer</b>		<b>Schools</b>	
<b>Membership Secretary</b>		<b>Technical Team</b>	
<b>Research &amp; Floodlighting</b>		<b>Committee members</b>	
<b>Publications</b>		<b>Newsletter Editor and President</b>	

Helen Buchanan and Caroline Fairclough have retired and we are grateful for their valuable service.

We mourn the sudden death of David Phillips who did so much for the Society

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

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

## VISIT TO THE ISLE OF WIGHT

Thirty-three of us set out for the Isle of Wight on June 17 stopping en route in Salisbury. Here we visited Mompesson House, an 18th-century house set in Cathedral Close, as well as the cathedral itself and had ample time for lunch.



We arrived a little later than scheduled in Ryde thanks to the huge numbers of pop festival fans returning to the mainland but were still in good time for dinner. We stayed at the Royal Esplanade in Ryde where we were collected the following morning by our driver from Seaview Coaches, a local company. We had been unable to use our usual Monmouthshire company as all its coaches were needed for the school run. But this proved a bonus as our driver really knew his stuff. His first suggestion was to visit the church built by Prince Albert for Queen Victoria which entailed a short detour en route to Osborne House.

Day three took us to Farringford House, the winter residence of Alfred Lord Tennyson, near Freshwater on the west side of the island. For some years it had been a hotel, and Ian Smith recalled having stayed here some 45 years ago. After closing, it was bought by a wealthy woman who has turned it into a shrine to the poet, recreating the original wallpaper and filling the house with his work and furnishings.



This house together with its fabulous walled garden was said by many to have been the highlight of the trip. Tantalisingly, the identity of the new owner is a well-kept secret.



After departing Freshwater, our next stop was Shanklin to catch the electrified railway to Smallbrook Junction to connect with the steam railway. A real trip down memory lane for many.



Day four saw us visiting Carisbrooke Castle before heading to Fishbourne to catch the ferry and return home to Abergavenny via Marlborough

**HELEN MORGAN**

*Dear Helen, Kirsty has asked me to email you to say how much she enjoyed your group's visit to Farringford yesterday. It is not often that so many great questions are asked and the team all commented on how lovely it was. We thought you would like to know and hope that you visit us again another day.*

*Sophie Adkins Marketing Manager Farringford Estate Limited*

# THE KING'S MESSAGE

## “Stand Calm, Firm and United”

### A CHALLENGE TO CIVILISED ORDER

BROADCASTING to the Empire on Sunday night the King said :—

“ In this grave hour, perhaps the most fateful in our history, I send to every household of my people, both at home and overseas, this message, spoken with the same depth of feeling for each one of you as if I were able to cross your threshold and speak to you myself.

“ For the second time in the lives of most of us, we are at war.

“ Over and over again we have tried to find a peaceful way out of the differences between ourselves and those who are now our enemies.

#### FORCED INTO A CONFLICT

“ But it has been in vain. We have been forced into a conflict, for we are called with our allies to meet the challenge of a principle which, if it were to prevail, would be fatal to any civilised order in the world.

“ It is the principle which permits a State, in the selfish pursuit of power, to disregard its treaties and its solemn pledges, which sanctions the use of force or threat of force against the sovereignty and independence of other States.

“ Such a principle, stripped of all disguise, is surely the mere primitive doctrine that might is right, and if this principle were established throughout the world the freedom of our own country and of the whole British Commonwealth of Nations would be in danger.

#### KEPT IN BONDAGE OF FEAR

“ But far more than this — the peoples of the world would be kept in the bondage of fear, and all hopes of settled peace and of the security of justice and liberty among nations would be ended.

“ This is the ultimate issue which confronts us.

“ For the sake of all that we ourselves hold dear, and of the world's order and peace, it is unthinkable that we should refuse to meet the challenge.

“ It is to this high purpose that I now call my people at home and my peoples across the seas, who will make our cause their own.

“ I ask them to stand calm and firm, and united in this time of trial.

#### THE TASK WILL BE HARD

“ The task will be hard. There may be dark days ahead, and war can no longer be confined to the battlefield, but we can only do the right as we see the right, and reverently commit our cause to God.

“ If one and all we keep resolutely faithful to it, ready for whatever service or sacrifice it may demand, then with God's help we shall prevail.

“ May He bless and keep us all.”

The King spoke from his study at Buckingham Palace. He was alone in the room. The Queen listened in to the speech from another room in the Palace.

## 80 YEARS SINCE THE TOWN TROD THE ROAD TO WAR

We can glimpse this road through the eyes of a 6 year old Abergavenny girl, Bethel Kyte. She was frightened of war, which she had heard being talked about and wrote to Neville Chamberlain, who had recently returned from his ultimately unsuccessful visit to Munich. She said she was glad he'd had a safe journey in his aeroplane, as she didn't want her daddy to have to go to war. No doubt these feelings were repeated in millions of families.

A couple of months later in January 1939 Neville Chamberlain broadcast to the nation seeking volunteers for the Government's scheme for National Service. The speech was printed in the Chronicle, and beneath it was an advertisement for the Richards Store, promoting their radios!

In March the Town Council discussed the Government's evacuation scheme, as well as 300 local people being trained for air raid, first aid and decontamination duties. There was pride that “Abergavenny would always come up to scratch when called upon”.

In April the Town Council believed that the town could accommodate 1500 people evacuated from Birmingham, in the event of war. Also that meeting heard that a mechanised army column would travel from Cardiff to Newcastle calling at Abergavenny. The public could see the latest guns and equipment, and learn the rates of pay and conditions in the Service.

Later in the month displays of modern war weapons were to be

shown in the Drill Hall, organised by 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion the Monmouthshire Regiment. The weapons included machine guns, anti-tank rifles, trench mortars and armoured vehicles. There were also tactical exercises on Llangynidr Mountain for the Officers. The Police Station was exhibiting a model of a 9ft deep bomb proof shelter, with electric light. In early June a significant event took place. Abergavenny had been very supportive of the League of Nations over many years and because of this the town was chosen to host the annual conference of the Welsh National Council of the League of Nations. Lord Davies spoke at the conference, saying he was inspired to see so many young people there, as the present generation had messed things up. He was saddened that it had been difficult over 20 years to rouse people to revitalise the League, and had this been done there would be no menace of war in any country. The Finance Officer appealed to the churches in Wales to support the League.

In the well-attended evening public meeting, Lord Davies blamed the fact that the democracies of Europe were again facing war, on their apathetic refusal to think out problems, and on their unwillingness to take risks in the cause of justice. He believed all British political parties had failed to support the League, which had contributed to the present conscription and re-armament race. He also called for Britain, France and Russia to constitute an International Air Police Force of 30,000 aeroplanes. If Britain had involved Russia in the Munich conference, and Austria and Czechoslovakia had not been treated so badly, there may be some trust in Britain by Russia. There was also the frightening possibility of Russia siding with Germany and Italy.

He continued that if the League abdicates its functions, weak nations would arm, then ally with their strongest neighbour and soon Europe would be at the mercy of the strongest powers. He wanted all European members of the League to join a pact to resist aggression, and military and economic experts to establish a mutual defence. British non-self-governing territories should come under the control of an International Commission administered by international Civil Servants. "These proposals are designed to create the nucleus of a United States of Europe."

He knew that Hitler and Mussolini would not join the pact, but it would be clear to their peoples that there was no desire to coerce a country, other than an aggressor, and no plan to encircle them because they are totalitarian. If Germany and Italy were to disarm there would be no threat to them. The International Air Police Force would be crucial. For them, and Britain and France to disarm, there would need to be a transition period to avoid mass unemployment. Totalitarian countries would need help from wealthy countries. All this would be less costly than war which would probably create European bankruptcy.

In July 45,000,000 Home Office leaflets were delivered to households throughout the country. There were a series of leaflets aimed at educating the public on civil defence, air warfare, air raid warnings, gas masks, lighting restrictions, etc. A full practice of the Abergavenny ARP Personnel took place in late July. It sounded very realistic with a rescue and demolition squad freeing someone trapped in debris.

By late August the mood was graver with the tense situation between Germany and Poland being explained, and Mr Chamberlain giving the Government wide powers to deal with any crisis. Royal Assent had been given to the Emergency Powers (Defence) Bill. On 1<sup>st</sup> September the Chronicle carried an article that Germany had started bombing Polish cities, Danzig had been declared a German city and many people had been killed. Hitler had offered 16 points to settle the Danzig question, but Poland found these unacceptable.

On 8<sup>th</sup> September the Chronicle revealed that 329 evacuated children, 35 teachers and 12 adult helpers had arrived in Abergavenny from Birmingham. There should have been many more but at the last moment many parents couldn't part with their children.

Also on 8<sup>th</sup> September the Town Council postponed ordinary business and only dealt with emergency matters. The Mayor, Alderman Wm. Rosser, stated that they met in very sad circumstances, he hardly knew what to say, "but a call has been made on us in this town, and we shall answer." The Council and the civil population would have much work put upon them, but he already had proof that Abergavenny would maintain the high traditions of true patriotism. He spoke of the country's unity of purpose, and the wonderful speeches of the Sovereign and Prime Minister. He believed that right must prevail and "may God grant that the period of conflict be short."

The Chronicle printed the King's message to the Empire in full.

**JANET CONSTABLE**

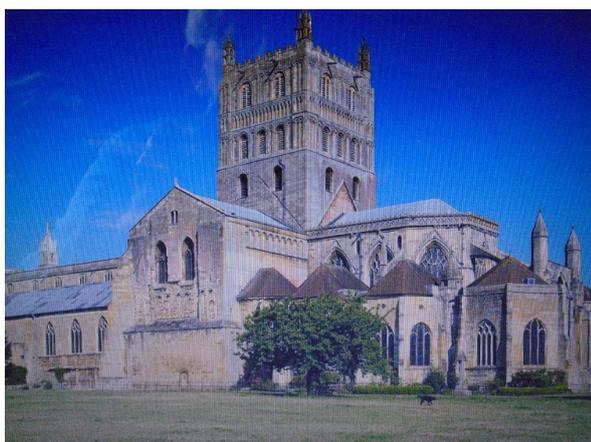
## SOCIETY'S VISIT TO TEWKESBURY AND DEERHURST



On a somewhat damp morning on May 29<sup>th</sup> we set off on a visit to Tewkesbury and Deerhurst in Gloucestershire.

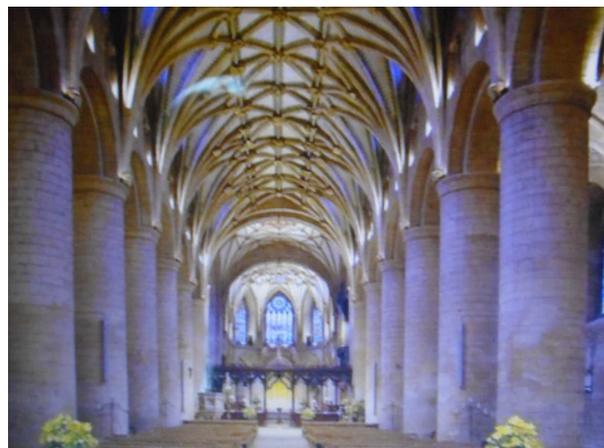


The journey to Tewkesbury took just over an hour and , after welcome coffee and biscuits, the group split into two for guided tours of the Abbey.



Tewkesbury Abbey will celebrate its 900<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2021. Its Norman tower is one of the finest in the UK and possibly the largest. After an explanation of many of the features of the Abbey's exterior, the first glimpse of the interior can only be described as breathtaking.

Fourteen gigantic Norman pillars are crowned with an elaborate vaulted ceiling dating from the 14<sup>th</sup> century, whose ribs meet in 15 coloured bosses representing events in the life of Christ.



The Abbey has witnessed many events in its long history, perhaps none so dramatic as those during the Wars of the Roses in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Looking up at the roof of the Quire, one sees a painted sun, emblem of the House of York. In 1471 the particularly bloody battle of Tewkesbury ended in victory for Edward of York (Edward IV) as he ended a temporary Lancastrian resurgence. The battle resulted in the death of Edward of Lancaster, Lancastrian Prince of Wales and shortly afterwards, his father, the deposed Henry VI died – or was murdered – in the Tower of London.

The Lancastrian nobles who survived the battle fled into the Abbey, seeking sanctuary, only to be dragged out within a few days, summarily tried and promptly beheaded! Such was the brutality of the Wars of the Roses.

Thanks to the fact that we were on a guided tour, we were taken into the sacristy(vestry)/treasury the substantial wooden doors of which are reinforced on the rear side with plates of horse armour salvaged from the battle. Formidable!

There is so much to be seen in the Abbey, that one visit is scarcely adequate. It continues to add features of beauty up to the present day, such as the magnificent Denny stained glass windows installed in 2002 to commemorate the 900<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the coming of the Benedictines to Tewkesbury.

Leaving the Abbey, members went their various ways in search of lunch and to explore a few of Tewkesbury's historical features such as its medieval alleyways.



Meeting up again we proceeded a few miles to the village of Deerhurst and its remarkable church containing features dating from Saxon times through to the present. It is justifiably famous for those Saxon features, and a short walk away lies another Saxon treasure, Odda's Chapel.

The Saxon highlights include a very fine font, which was discovered acting as a cattle trough about a 100 years ago. A double headed opening in the west wall of the nave is a wonderful example of Saxon architecture. Marvellous



sculptured heads of beasts also date from pre- Conquest times. The church also contains examples of later architectural styles such as Early English and decorated Gothic.



Historically it was at its most important in Saxon times. In 1016 it was the scene of a peace treaty between the Dane, Cnut, and the Saxon, Edmund Ironside, in which they divided England between them. Edmund died a year later and Cnut took the lot.

Odda's Chapel was also re-discovered in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, having fallen into disuse in the middle ages and eventually becoming part of a 17<sup>th</sup> century farmhouse, to which it is still attached. It is now protected by English Heritage. Also discovered nearby was the dedication stone attributing the chapel's foundation by Earl Odda, a relative of King Edward the Confessor. In Latin, it is mounted on a wall of the chapel – with a translation!

Leaving Deerhurst we headed towards the M50 and homewards. On the way we passed through the villages of Staunton and Corse, where in a brief stop we encountered features of



an altogether different episode of history, Chartism. Living as we do in South Wales, we are well aware of its history there, but these 2 villages contain evidence of a lesser known aspect of the movement, namely the Chartist Land Company, founded by Fergus O'Connor. The organisation planned to establish a series of rural communities, housing workers from industrial towns, so that they could live in harmony with the land and each other.

The experiment ultimately failed, but not before, in 1847 – 8, it erected some 80 cottages and a schoolroom in the Snigs End Settlement between the 2 villages. The cottages – often extended – still stand as does the schoolroom, which later became the now redundant Prince of Wales pub. The buildings with their central gable and a wing either side are easily recognisable.



**DAVID POWELL**

### UPDATE ON THE PLAS GUNTER MANSION CROSS STREET

The architectural survey was completed last Autumn and raised as many questions as it answered. It did conclude that the original house was built in the very early 1600s as a house with an upper floor, reached by a stair over the fireplace, and a downstairs cross passage from Cross Street (unpaved then below the South Gate) to the rear garden entrance, with a large hall to the south and a smaller room to the north, both with chimneys. Shortly afterwards a spiral stair was added to the north and a porched entrance into the cross passage from the garden. Later, possibly in the 1670s, the southern wing was added including the famous chapel in the attic. They think, from the position of blocked windows, that there was a dog-leg staircase at this end. The paintings expert confirmed the presence of IHS, the sign of the Jesuits, painted over the window in the chapel and also found paintings on the walls, which it is hoped we can restore.

An 'intention to apply for a Heritage Lottery grant' has now been made with an outline of the plans for the conversion and later use to generate an income. Your chairperson has been busy giving talks on the house to spread the word to the wider community (and raise some funds for the project!).

**GILL WAKLEY**

## ALHS RESEARCH GROUP WORKS WITH THE MUSEUM AND KING HENRY VIII STUDENTS

Abergavenny Museum has been able to purchase Bronze Age hoards discovered locally with the help of the 'Saving Treasures; Telling Stories' project.

The hoards are almost all from the Late Bronze Age and represent a few of the surprisingly large number from this period that have been found in South-east Wales. One Late Bronze Age hoard from Grosmont Community, known as the Llanddewi Skirrid Hoard, was discovered in April 2015. The hoard consists of twelve bronze tools and weapons, including a variety of socketed axes, a spearhead and sword blade fragments. Some of the objects may have come from outside Britain, as the sword was of a type commonly found in France. The hoard had been buried away from any known Bronze Age settlement sites, but close to a water source, which may have been significant. Other hoards acquired are: two socketed axes and a spearhead, and another of nine socketed axes, both from Llantilio Crossenny.



*Llanddewi Skirrid Hoard*

They are particularly interesting, in that some of the metalwork shows signs of having been reheated after use, and some had been damaged before being deposited. They appear to have been deliberately placed, perhaps arranged, in a pit or pits. There are other hoards which have been bought by Pontypool and Newport Museums and some of the hoards are of national importance and have gone to Cardiff National Museum. Another puzzle is the lack of evidence for settlements in the immediate area.

The students from King Henry VIII School and from Coleg Gwent are looking at the research about the Bronze Age in this area carried out by volunteers from the Research Group of ALHS and, importantly, the regulations about metal detecting. We went with the students on a visit to the archaeological department of Cardiff Museum to find out more and look at many other hoards and typical South Wales axes.



*The two hoards from Llantilio Crossenny*

It was very fortunate that the metal detectors at Llandewi Skirrid halted the discovery (as they should) once they realised what they had found, and the farmer, on whose land they were working, put a large trailer over the site to protect it until it could be excavated under controlled conditions by the archaeologists from Cardiff. The items then had to be conserved and examined before declared as Treasure Trove to the Coroner. The objects then had to be bought – and the money to do this has come from Saving Treasures; Telling Stories. This is an HLF funded project which is acquiring archaeological objects for local and national collections, providing training for heritage professionals and volunteers and engaging local communities with their pasts through the funding of community archaeology projects led by local museums throughout Wales.

An exciting part of the project is to video the practical demonstrations of casting an axe and then hafting it.

*Shown below.*



The students will also interview the landowners and detectorists where the hoard was found and include this aspect of the history of the objects within the display.

Creative writing workshops will be offered to the general public. This work will be included within an exhibition that will be curated by the students. Look out for this exciting project which will be on display in Abergavenny Museum from November 2019. Rhiannon Biebrach will be coming to give a talk about the project on Wednesday November 13<sup>th</sup> at the Borough Theatre as part of our lecture programme.

### **GILL WAKLEY & DENISE KEYNON**

*are the researchers for ALHS. Contact them if you want any other information.*

## **THE HOME FRONT IN ABERGAVENNY IN WORLD WAR ONE**



The research project carried out by the Research Group resulted in a publication which appeared in the Gwent Local History Journal and a display. The display went to several venues including Plas Gunter Mansion for August 2018, a display at Cwmbran Theatre for a day event and a commemorative day on November 10<sup>th</sup> at St Woolos Cathedral in Newport. The latter event attracted over one thousand visitors who toured the displays, had Anzac biscuits and other 'treats' and listened to songs from the era. The photo shows part of our display in the cathedral.

**GILL WAKLEY**

## THE MUSEUM CELEBRATES 60 YEARS

On 2nd July, Abergavenny Museum celebrated 60 years since it first opened to the public. Over 80 guests, which included former and current staff, long time supporters and local volunteers, gathered in Castle House, which itself celebrates its 200th anniversary this year. It was particularly pleasing to welcome guests associated with the very early days. Barbara Jackson, who was at the opening in 1959 - her uncle Alfred and father Ernest were the driving force behind the setting up of the museum. Members of Abergavenny Rotary representing those members in the 1950s who had set up



the first Museum sub-committee.

Ken Key who was present when a working party transported one of the museum's key artefacts - the Adoration of the Magi wall

painting, from the Gunter House, in a wheelbarrow! And Beryl Jones, whose husband Gwyn was a founder of Abergavenny Local History Society and who in 1960 worked with pupils from King Henry VIII School to curate the Welsh Kitchen display.



Guests were treated to a speech full of humour about the foundation of the museum, by Frank Olding former Curator, whilst Councillor Sheila Woodhouse made formal thanks to staff and volunteers who have made the museum the success it is today. Like all good birthday parties there was cake to round off the celebrations.

**RACHAEL ROGERS**

## BAILEY PARK: AN OUTLINE OF ITS HISTORY

Bailey Park was formerly called Priory Meadow. It was leased to Crawshay Bailey for 21 years at £100 p.a. by the Rev. W. W. Roberts (acting as representative for Captain John Roberts of Petersham, Surrey) on December 31st. 1883. Crawshay Bailey developed the land as a park, erecting gates and railings, paying a Park Keeper, setting up a management committee and finally opening the park to the public. After his death in 1887, his legal representatives allowed the land to be used for public recreation under the control of the management committee.



The gates were probably made by the iron-founders who operated out of Frogmore Street and had a foundry in Lewis Lane. One of the Blue Plaques put up by ALHS is on the right hand pier in the photograph

In 1894 the Abergavenny Improvement Commissioners negotiated to purchase the freehold of the land. They obtained a loan of £2500 from the local Government Board towards the total price

of £5000, and received the remainder from donations. Mrs. Crawshay Bailey gave £500, her two daughters £500 each and the Trustees of Crawshay Bailey gave £1000 in lieu of the unexpired term of the lease. The Park was conveyed by the Rev. Roberts (as agent for Captain Roberts) on 30th. December 1894. Following this purchase, the Abergavenny Improvement Commissioners executed a Deed Poll on 31st. December 1894, providing for the retention of the name "Bailey Park". Bailey Park came to be administered by the Abergavenny Borough Council as successors to the Abergavenny Improvement Commissioners, and later (April 1973) the title was taken over by Monmouth District Council. So Crawshay Bailey never *owned* Bailey Park, although he and his family certainly developed it and were most generous benefactors.

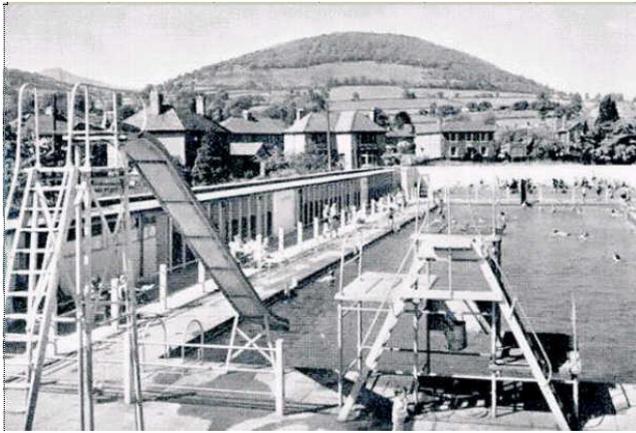
During the First World War, Monmouthshire Volunteers (Abergavenny) Corps were allowed to use Bailey Park for training and drill two evenings and one afternoon a week. The Royal Engineers who were at Abergavenny in 1915 training, learning how to build trenches and live under canvas, did quite a bit of damage to the training grounds that they used, including Bailey Park, which had to be repaired.

On March 31<sup>st</sup> 1916, an advertisement was placed in the Abergavenny Chronicle stating that a flying exhibition would take place in Bailey Park. Many people turned up hoping for a good show and were surprised that no ground was cordoned off and no-one was around to control the crowds. Eventually, they drifted off when nothing happened. It was later apparent that this was an 'April Fool's Joke' which most people did not find very funny under the circumstances of the war!

Janet Constable wrote an article for a previous newsletter detailing her researches to identify the chestnuts and oak trees that had been grown from chestnuts and acorns collected from Verdun battlefield. The Mayoress had planted the seedlings in Bailey Park at the Peace celebrations in July 1919. Janet found chestnut trees in a shady area near the children's playground and a further clump near the bandstand. These seemed to be more purposefully grouped, and there were two stumps of felled trees, and those trees may once have formed part of the Peace Grove.

December 20<sup>th</sup> 1919 saw the arrival of a war-worn tank to Bailey Park. It was placed on a plinth, to look as if it was going over the top of a trench. The remains of the plinth can still be seen to the side of the path that runs parallel to the road, near to the main gates on Hereford Road. ALHS have put up an information board nearby. About 200 tanks were distributed to towns that had done exceptionally well in raising money for the War Savings during the First World War. The tank was removed in the Second World War for the scrap metal collections.

#### BAILEY PARK POOL THEN



#### AND NOW



The swimming pool was opened in 1938. It was an outdoor pool of 128 x 35 feet with a paddling pool and a fountain. Bill Edwards, who died in 1960, was employed by Monmouthshire County Council as its first swimming instructor. He first taught children to swim in the River Usk beneath the Castle, but after leaving the army in 1939 he took up his post at the new pool in Bailey Park. The pool was kept going by the efforts of the "Friends of Bailey Park Pool", who ran a café and raised money for repairs and equipment. But in 1966, the Abergavenny Town Council, who ran the pool, decided that the pool required too much work to meet health and safety regulations and it was closed. The pools have been filled in and can be traced by the looking at the attractive floral displays in the beds. There are an enthusiastic group of people who would like to see the outdoor pool re-instated.



Bailey Park is home to many events – the Steam Fair, the Shire Horse Show, the Circus, the cycling events and many more. The Friends of Bailey Park work hard to keep the area litter-free and the flower beds looking good, but are depleted in number and need more help. They have recently put up an information board next to the main gates. The Sports Committee help to maintain the sports pitches and run the many games during the week and the weekends.

Much of the structure of Bailey Park – the Pavilion, the Bandstand, the railings and the gates are looking rather sorry for themselves now. The Town Council and interested parties are getting together to see if money can be obtained to improve this important heritage and community asset.

**GILL WAKLEY**

## **Annual report Abergavenny Local History Society January 1<sup>st</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018**

The objects of Abergavenny Local History Society (charity registration number 1098582) are:

1. To promote the local community's knowledge of and interest in history
2. To provide local historical and general interest information for visitors
3. To support Abergavenny Museum and Castle

Achievements to meet these objects

1. During the Spring Term 2018 the society members attended lectures on: Merthyr's infamous criminal community in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Troy House: architecture, gardens and residents, Wall Paintings of St Christopher, Men of Steel: a history of steel working in Port Talbot, and The People of the Black Mountains: Raymond Williams and Archaeology. In the Autumn Term they heard lectures on The Bacton Altar Cloth and Queen Elizabeth 1st, The Man from Merthyr who founded a town in Russia, and the Glory Days of Raglan Castle.

During the summer months, visits to places of historic interest included: guided tours in the Forest of Dean, to Worcester to see the Cathedral, the Commandery or the Museum of Royal Worcester, Dyffryn House and Gardens and the Royal Mint, and a look at history and industrial heritage in Blaenau Gwent. A stay in West Wales involved visits to Picton Castle, St David's Cathedral and Palace, the Preseli Mountains, Nevern Church and the harbour village of Porthgain, with a visit to Abereiddi blue lagoon and a visit to Carew Castle and tidal mill before returning home.

The newsletter included short reports on the visits of the previous year for those unable to attend. It also included articles on Old Hereford Road Cemetery, Food shortages in Abergavenny In the First World War, A Shocking Murder at Abergavenny in 1892, the history of Hope House in Monk Street, archaeological discoveries in Wales, a meeting of the Morgan Three-wheeler club, and a book review on Abergavenny A History Tour by our past chairman Irene Morgan.

2. To provide information about local history to visitors and more widely, the research group wrote an article summarising their research on the Home front in Abergavenny In World War One which appeared in the Spring Edition of the Gwent Local History Journal. They also produced a display from that research which was hosted by Gunter Mansion, Cross Street, during August and appeared subsequently at several commemoration events across Gwent. The research group completed all they could do on recording the gravestones in Old Hereford Road Cemetery. They also recorded information that appeared in press reports of notable deaths of those buried in the cemetery. The information was collated into a searchable DVD available for purchase (and, for research, at the Gwent Archives). The Abergavenny Street Survey ([www.abergavennystreetsurvey.co.uk](http://www.abergavennystreetsurvey.co.uk)) continues to be updated with information. The research group had previously contributed to an initial survey of historical sources for Gunter Mansion and several members have continued to support the work as part of a Gunter History group. Two new research projects have started. One on Tourism in Abergavenny and District, the other on the lead up and impact of World War Two on Abergavenny.

The society continued to support the Abergavenny Eisteddfod with a donation and the chairman announced and presented the literary prizes. Each year the society encourages applications from people from local schools who are going on to study History at University. Kieran Dobbs, who studied at King Henry VIII Comprehensive School, and has gone on to study History at Kings College London, is the latest to receive a History Award of £200.

Once a week, the society organises and provides a human presence in St Mary's Priory Church which contains one of the best collections of monuments in the country and the only wooden Jesse Tree. We can provide information about the collection and its links to the local history to visitors and local people.

Two further free leaflets in the series 'Trails and Tales – 'Parks & Gardens' and 'Chapels & Churches' were published and have been extremely popular with visitors.

Members continue to receive emails notifying them about events of historical interest in the area as well as information about the activities of the society.

The society provides information to the wider public via the website: [www.abergavennylocalhistorysociety.co.uk](http://www.abergavennylocalhistorysociety.co.uk) from where guided walks can be downloaded or leaflets or books requested. Information about the society activities is available. Visitors can attend lectures free (although we do ask for a donation). Links to other societies of relevance are also provided and there is a query page where questions about local history can be collected. Answers are provided or the question passed onto other bodies who may be able to assist. The annual report and financial reports are made available on the website.

3. The Castle and Museum continue to be floodlight during the evenings of September to April. The cost of sponsorship was increased to £10 towards the cost of maintenance and electricity, although most of this comes out of the main account and has increased considerably recently. The Victorian Garden in the Castle grounds, maintained by members, continues to attract many compliments from visitors.

New displays have been created in the Museum and opening hours have been changed to reflect the greater demand for Sunday and lunchtime opening. Members of the society volunteer at the Museum and the society is supportive of the intention of the Museum service to provide an Events Pavilion in the grounds to provide a covered space for activities. The society are conscious of the long-standing connection with and support for the Museum which was set up by the fore-runners of the present society.

#### **Officers and structure:**

**President:** Ken Key

**Committee Members (with their main responsibilities) who were confirmed at the AGM in May 2018 were:**

**Chairman:** G Wakley. **Secretary:** M Senior. **Treasurer:** J Cormack

**Lecture & visits team:** H Morgan, J Zajicek , S Langford-Johnson, C Fairclough

**Membership Officer:** J Patrick

**Website and email notifications/ Research Group co-ordinator:** S Smith

**Floodlighting:** H. Buchanan

**Publications:** I Hofayz

**Publicity:** D Phillips

**Schools Liaison & refreshments:** J White

**Refreshments:** J Butt

**Other committee members:** D Morgan

**Monmouthshire Museums nominated representative:** R Rogers

Many thanks to all for their hard work throughout the year, including those, not on the committee, who assist by running the projector at meetings, gardening in the Museum Garden, researching, and organising or being on the rota for church watch.

The committee meet formally in February, April, September and November with any additional meetings as required.

It has been agreed that the Membership of the Society from May 2019 will continue until September 2020. Thereafter it should be renewed annually.

**Dr G Wakley Chairman**

## LOOKING BACK

It seems incredible that our Society is 42 years old.

Freda and I came from Knutsford to Croesyceiliog in January 1956 and moved to a house of our own design (Mark 2) in Abergavenny in 1957. The Manchester Guardian came the day after publication if you were lucky. There were no supermarkets then but the Stanhope Street corner shop fulfilled most of our needs. It would even deliver if there was no room in the pram with the girls. However, there were many expeditions across the border to England to pick up things not available here.

It was a new experience to live in "Wales and Monmouthshire" and although the Abergavenny Chronicle published a little Welsh, we felt that Wales didn't really start till one got to Brynmawr. We tried hard to pronounce the Welsh place names. An old OS map showed a place called Cae Pyscodlyn but on the new OS map it was 'Cape of Scotland' so we tended to give up!

In 1959-60 a large swathe of the town in Tudor Street was demolished. Unfortunately many things were lost for ever but in July 1959 Alfred and Earnest Jackson, with encouragement from the Round Table, started the Museum Society, expertly curated by Duggan Thacker. They invited my wife Freda to join their committee, a great honour for someone from across Offa's Dyke. My young daughters Rosemary and Margaret, keen pony clubbers, regularly cleaned and preserved the display of saddlery and tack. The formation of the museum was very timely and much of our history was saved. However, in time it was apparent the museum would benefit from a more formalised structure so the Council took over the museum in 1971 and has made it one of Abergavenny's star attractions.

Another of Freda's activities was to teach at Christchurch Sunday school and to start a Wolf Cub pack where she was Akela. Sadly, the pack had to transfer to Lewis's Lane affecting the younger church members.

Then Gwyn Jones and Freda started the Archaeology Group and between 1962 and 1969 with help from Jeremy Knight, Father Fabian Radcliffe, George Boon and others excavated in Castle Street where the Post Office now stands.

Alan Probert was engaged to equip an upstairs room in the castle for the Archaeology Group. He became fascinated by what we were doing and in 1966 started an excavation on Twyn-y-Gaer. He turned himself into a professional archaeologist and became a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries in 1977.

People tired of trailing up Twyn-y-Gaer each weekend and so Alan found a site in town. A site director was needed and I read up what I could and in 1968 opened up trenches in Ewers Garden in Castle Street. A vast amount of broken pottery and the corner of a Roman barrack block were discovered.

The year 1972 caused a great upheaval in life for both Freda and myself. ICI made me redundant and I turned myself into a physics master at Croesyceiliog school. I had to abandon the dig which was filled in to make a car park. I was most disappointed not to have time to take part in the professional dig which took place next to Ewers Garden. We had two young children to support on a greatly reduced income so Freda returned to her profession as a librarian and was rapidly promoted in the November to Regional Librarian for Rural Monmouthshire. In the same year Freda became a magistrate and was also President of the Townswomen's Guild.

So! 1972 was hardly the moment to start something new but Freda and Gwyn Jones started our Abergavenny Local History Society. The enthusiastic committee included Freda as Treasurer, Alan Spink as Secretary.

We met originally in the Girls school in Harold Road and in time we moved to the Scout Hut in the Fairfield. The Society grew rapidly and we moved to the Angel Ballroom. I was able to offer practical assistance by providing six small loudspeakers to help with the acoustics.

Regular memorable speakers were Arthur Peplow and Frank Olding.

Our next venue was, I believe, in 1994 although I cannot be sure. Having arranged our programme, we were astonished to find that a dance class had taken over our Thursdays. We had not heard of the change from the Angel but were able to move to the Town Hall. This proved very comfortable until this last season when proposed renovations moved us to King Henry's School. We are now back in the Borough Theatre and will meet on Wednesdays as that seems more popular with members.

In 1985 Freda organised enough money to install floodlights for the Castle. I cared for them for some years, but by law had to relinquish this task as I am only a Chartered Electrical Engineer and not an 'electrician'!

Paddy Beynon has for many years tended the Local History Victorian Garden in the Castle grounds.

St Mary's Priory church contains a great deal of our history and Freda asked me to organise a rota for members to help visitors and also to watch for any undesirables. Michael Pryce-Williams has now taken over this task and welcomes volunteers.

For some years the Society has organised Town Tours where we walk a crowd round our town and point out its historical features, many of which are identified by 23 or more blue plaques and QR Points.

We have visited many historic sites both locally and throughout the country. Alan and Kath Spink would always visit the site beforehand so that the visit went smoothly

Several of us went regularly to Newport Library to scan the 'Close Rolls', originally to research St Mary's Priory. This resulted in our finding out a great deal about our town's history. Sue Smith and our Research Group continue this work. The history of the Hereford Road cemetery and photographic records of the town are just a few of its projects.

Freda started the annual newsletter in 1985 and I typed it out. In 1987 I acquired an early computer with a word processor and a dot matrix printer. For issue No 13 in 1997 I acquired a Windows computer. It was not until 1998 that I was able to publish photographs.

In April 1989 tragedy struck when Freda suddenly died of a brain tumour. My feeling was confirmed that this was not just a History Society but also a large group of real friends, closer and even more helpful and sympathetic than my local church where I had been a lay reader.

The success of our Society is due to the tireless work of the many members of the committee. I look back on them as good friends and there have been so many of them that inevitably many have been missed out and I ask for their forgiveness.

I was honoured in 2009 to receive the Town Award for my services. It is also a great honour to be made President of our Society. My wife Freda did an enormous amount for our Society and for our town. and I am sure, had she survived, she would be the one occupying these roles.

The newsletter is now in its 35<sup>th</sup> edition. I am grateful to all those who have proofread my copy and pointed out errors and omissions.

I am particularly grateful to Sue Smith who for some years has e-mailed coloured copies to members and printed black and white copies for those not on line.

I have tried to make the newsletter interesting and although for one or two editions I have had to write a lot of it myself, I am grateful to so many members for their contributions.

I wonder if, as I reach my 94<sup>th</sup> birthday, it might be time for me to let someone else have a go at it!

**KEN KEY**