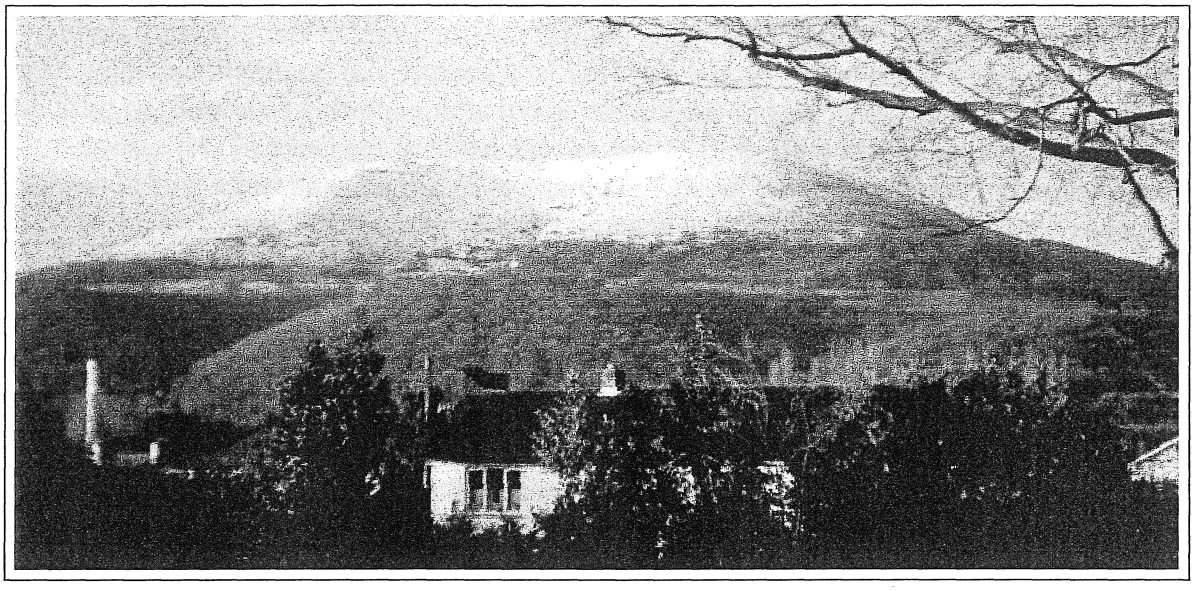
# ABERGAVENNY LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY



Hill's tram-road runs across the face of the Blorenge from Garnderis Forge on the right to the incline down to the canal at Llanfoist on the left. The canal also runs across the face of the Blorenge and at one time ran all the way from Brecon to Newport.

## NEWSLETTER No 18

## AUGUST 2002

## SUMMER VISITS 2001

For the first time since 1996 I arranged a three day visit. 46 members enjoyed going to Derbyshire. Our first stop was at Repton Church with its crypt dating back to the 6th century and our guide also gave us details of the considerable interest in the area by the Vikings. After lunch we went on to the Tramway Museum at Crick which has dozens of old trams and we all enjoyed a ride on one of them. On the following morning we visited what many thought was the jewel of the weekend, Haddon Hall. The house has remained virtually unchanged since the 14th century and is complimented by its award winning rose garden. The weather wasn't too kind to us but after exploring Bakewell we went on to the treasure house of Chatsworth built in 1552 and still the home of the Duke of Devonshire.
We stopped off on our way home at the lovely old village of Tissington and had a guided tour of the Hall which has been the family home of the Fitzherbert family for over 500 years.
Our summer visits began with a visit to two very different houses. Firstly we went to Coughton Court, a family home since the 15th century, and it was here that some of the wives of members of the Gunpowder Plot waited for news. In the afternoon we went on to Baddesley Clinton, a mediaeval moated manor house dating from the 14th century.
Arthur Peplow took us around several Herefordshire churches including Kilpeck, Castle Frome, Ledbury, Dymock and Kempley describing their wonderful architecture, sculptures and frescos
Our first half day visit was to Corsham Court, an Elizabethan house built in 1582 and containing wonderful collections of paintings, sculptures and porcelain and a garden planned by Capability Brown.
The second half day visit was not to a house but a garden, Hampton Court Garden, created just north of Hereford. The extensive gardens with canals, pavilions, a maze, a grotto and waterfalls have been created in the grounds of a mediaeval fortified manor house.
Our final visit was a fitting finale to the year when we went to the home of the Dukes of Bedford for over 400 years, Woburn Abbey. We were treated to a magnificent art collection including 21 views of Venice by Caneletto, also collections of furniture and silver and an antiques centre. Truly a lovely way to end our summer visits.

Alan Spink

## PROGRAMME

**2002**

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|---|---|
| Thurs. 26th Sept. | Mr Frank Olding<br>ANCIENT MONUMENTS I HAVE KNOWN |
| Thurs. 24th Oct. | Ms Liz Pitman<br>THE BRUTE FAMILY MONUMENTS |
| Thurs. 28th Nov. | 25TH ANNIVERSARY LECTURE<br>Prof. Mick Aston |
| Thurs. 19th Dec. | MEMBERS CHRISTMAS DINNER<br>at the Lamb & Flag Hotel, Abergavenny<br>7.00pm for 7.30pm |

THE SOCIETY MEETS AT THE BOROUGH THEATRE AT 7.3OPM

MEMBERS SUBSCRIPTIONS ARE DUE AFTER THE A.G.M.

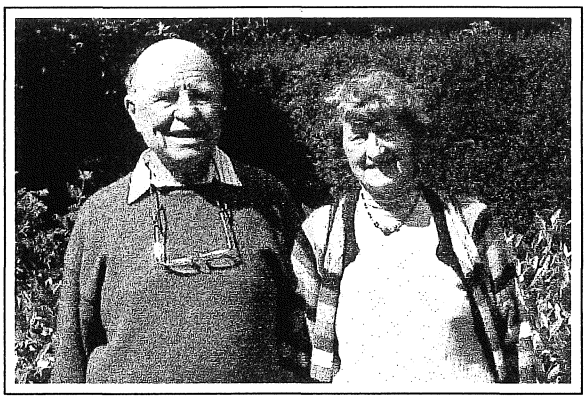
**2003**

| | |
|---|---|
| Thurs. 16th Jan. | Mr Keith Jones<br>RAILWAYS IN THE ABERGAVENNY AREA |
| Thurs. 27th Feb. | Mr John Evans<br>BLAENAVON -AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW |
| Friday 7th Mar. | QUIZ AND SUPPER NIGHT<br>at the Priory Centre |
| Thurs. 20th Mar. | Mr Arthur Peplow<br>STORIES FROM MEDIEVAL ART |
| Thurs. 17th Apr. | Mr Roger Morgan<br>THE BATTLE OF RORKE'S DRIFT AND THE ZULU WARS |
| Thurs. 15th May | 26TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING<br>followed by Ms Rachael Rogers<br>ABERGAVENNY CASTLE<br>-ITS PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE. |

## ALAN SPINK

Alan is one of our founder members and he and Kathleen between them have over the years held most of the offices of the Society. His organising ability and wise counsel are surely responsible for its tremendous success.
The picture shows him on one of the innumerable visits which he so meticulously planned and Kathleen playing her great supporting role beside him
Fortunately we are not going to lose him but he feels it is time to be in the audience rather than leading from the front.
Brigadier John Skinner and Trevor Scott have a difficult act to follow as visits' secretaries and Irena Morgan has taken over as secretary.

## HOWARD AND MARY PULLAN



Howard is a founder member of the Society and was Chairman with his late wife Beryl as Secretary of the Town Survey Group. He was on the original Plaques committee and for some time has taken charge of Publicity. He played an active part in the installation of the castle floodlights and will continue to advise us in the immediate future. How lucky was Howard to find Mary! She has been the floodlighting secretary for many years and has promised to carry on until someone from the committee can take over.
Abey Dore is a long way from Abergavenny and has room for the Pullan's many talents. We shall miss them on the committee but we hope to see them at our meetings and visits.

## ABERGAVENNY LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY WEBSITE

If you are online why not try logging onto the Abergavenny Local History Society website on **www.abergavennyhistory.co.uk.** The site gives details about the history of the town, the Priory and the castle, and tells you about the formation of the Society.
It has a full programme of events and details about many of the most historically important buildings in the town.
Perhaps what has caused the most comment is the 'Famous People' page listing some of those who have helped to put Abergavenny on the map by making some kind of contribution at Welsh or international level.
I hope to add even more people to this page and also hope to extend it by including a local section on the people who have helped to make the town of Abergavenny what it is today.
If you have any comments on the site please let me know.

Irena Morgan 01873 853957

## ABERGAVENNY'S BLUE PLAQUES

The number of Abergavenny's blue plaques will soon be increased to about 24. Over the years, the nine current plaques have generated a huge amount of interest among townspeople and visitors alike, especially on the town heritage walks conducted by the Society. It is hoped that the new plaques will help to foster even more interest among those who want to learn more about the town and its history.

The plaque sub-committee has now chosen the sites for the new plaques and a Newport company, Precision Castings, is currently in the process of manufacturing them. To finance the project, Monmouthshire County Council has given the society a £1,000 grant and Abergavenny Town Council has awarded us a total of £500.

The new plaques feature some of the trades which were once carried out in the town.

According to 18th and 19th century trade directories, these included periwig making, the shoe/boot industry and flannel weaving. The town was famous for the manufacture of the particularly fine Abergavenny Flannel, and even though the industry was moved to Longtown, the Abergavenny trademark name was still retained which suggests that it must have been highly prized.

In some cases, it has been very difficult to pinpoint exactly where a trade was carried out. It was then that the street survey, carried out by the Society during the 1980s, was proved to be invaluable. The survey helped the Society to win the 1985 Local History Society of the Year award, and is available for inspection at Abergavenny Library, Gwent Record Office and Abergavenny Museum.

Periwig making was -and still is -perhaps the hardest trade to locate. The only reference found in the survey was to a hair-bleacher, James Jones, who owned premises on the British Legion site in Nevill Street, then known as Rother Street.

Through the help and expertise of Tony Hopkins, of the Gwent Records Office, the names of two periwig makers were also found: James Gunter and James Morgan.

Armed with the appropriate reference figures-and a small fee-the National Library of Wales supplied photocopies of the wills or inventories of these three 18th century businessmen which listed their possessions and provided a fascinating insight into their everyday lives.

Though we have been unable to locate the Gunter and Morgan addresses one inventory has at least confirmed that James Jones owned the Rother Street premises. It has been pointed out that a James Gunter, who was married to an Elizabeth at the relevant time, was mentioned by Bradney in his A History of Monmouthshire as living in Cross Street but further research needs to be carried out.

We also wanted to highlight some of the town's oldest buildings and the sites of previous significant ones. Ethel Lina White is the author who wrote The Wheel Spins which was adapted into the classic 1938 Hitchcock film The Lady Vanishes and she wrote Some Must Watch which became the 1946 Robert Siodmak film The Spiral Staircase.

We also felt that Bailey Park, which could soon receive a facelift, should be commemorated as a heritage site and also dispel the myth that it was donated to the town by Crawshay Bailey II . The freehold of the park was bought by the Abergavenny Improvement Commissioners for £5,000 in 1894, though he had the land on a 21-year lease and had it laid out as a park for the public to use.

The plaque to John Fielding/Williams will obviously only go ahead if we can find his birthplace.

The nine current plaques are:

1, Tan House (in Cross Street);
2, The Gunter Mansion (Cross Street);
3, Site of the medieval South Gate (at the Coach and Horses, Cross Street);
4, Site of the medieval gate to St Mary's Priory (Monk Street);
5, North Gate (HSBC bank)
6, St John's Church -King Henry VIII Grammar School;
7, The Cow Inn (Nevill Street)
8, The West Gate (Castle Street/Tudor Street);
9, The Bull Inn (at the Abergavenny Post Office).

More information about these is included in the town walk leaflet by Gwyn Jones which is on sale at the Tourist Information Centre at Abergavenny Bus Station and at Abergavenny Museum. Or you could take one of the heritage walks conducted by the Society. Four are held each year during the Abergavenny Arts Festival and others are organised if there is sufficient demand.

**The new plaques:**

Here is a list of the new plaques and the sites at which they will be placed:1, Site of 18th century Welsh flannel mill (which will be sited at Cross Street).

2, Abergavenny was known for the manufacture of white periwigs. Here lived James Jones, hair bleacher, circa 1741 (British Legion building in Nevill Street)

3, Georgian house (Nevill Street)

4, In 1883 Crawshay Bailey II leased the Priory Meadows. In 1894 the town purchased the park for £5,000 (Bailey Park)

5, Tithe Barn, mainly 14th century on a 12th century site (St Mary's Tithe Barn)

6, The Town Hall was built in 1870 to replace John Nash's Market Hall. Note the black face of the clock on the north side (Abergavenny Town Hall)

7, Town's largest coaching inn during the 19 century (Angel Hotel)

8, Town's oldest inn. *(if confirmed)*. See 1660 Charles II coat of arms (Kings Arms)

9, High Cross (Junction of High Street and Cross Street)

10, Jettied row of shops, 16th century in origin, remodelled circa 1800 (Market Street)

11, Sheep market on this site until 1863 (Market Street)

12, Site of boot and shoe industry until 1865 (Cross Street):

13, Site of Roman barracks and granary, and also line of the 1241 Norman town wall.(Castle Street car park)

14, Author Ethel Lina White was born here. (37 Frogmore Street)

15, Birthplace of VC medal winner John Fielding/Williams *(if site can be located)*

**.John Fielding/Williams**

One site which we have yet to locate is the birthplace of John Fielding (1857-1932), also known as John Williams, who was awarded the Victoria Cross medal for his bravery at Rorke's Drift in the Zulu Wars in 1879 John Fielding is usually associated with Cwmbran where he lived for many years . But he was actually born in Merthyr Road, Abergavenny, on May 24, 1857, the second son of Irishman Michael and Margaret Fielding (nee Godsil). When he was five, his father, in search of work as a labourer, moved the family to Cwmbran.

John Fielding left school at the age of nine and started work at a nut and bolt works. He joined the army-enlisting at Monmouth on May 22, 1877, in the 24th Warwickshire Regiment of Foot, under the Williams alias, and and was then posted to B Company, 2nd Battalion, 24th regiment.

Extensive searches of census returns by our Treasurer, Douglas Edwards, and searches of other registers and archive records -with the help of Gwent Archivist David Rimmer -have so far failed to find the full address. Interviews with John Fielding's relatives have also drawn a blank. But if you can help and have any information please contact Douglas Edwards, tel 01873855161.

And if you want to know more about the Zulu campaigns watch out for the lecture on Thursday, April 17th, next year by Roger Morgan on The Battle of Rorke's Drift and the Zulu Wars.

**Child-friendly plaques**

The Society is also proposing to provide a series of child-friendly plaques to complement the Blue Plaques. When the project gets the financial go-ahead, these plaques will be sited at a child's eye-level, and will be a mixture of images and text in relief.

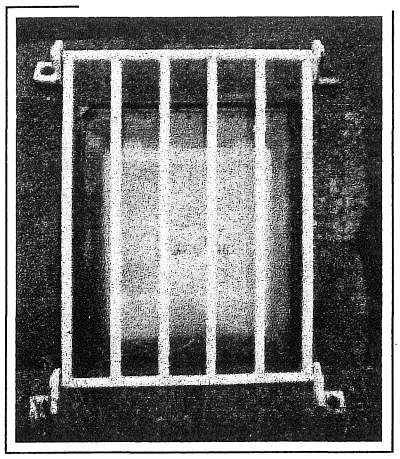
The idea comes from committee member and teacher Mrs Jane White who frequently takes classes of children on heritage walks around the town. "Children tend not to notice that their town has a long history .They have a simplistic grasp of history and do not think that it has anything to do with them. They don't look up and notice anything above them. A lot of children can't convert words on a plaque into a picture. Having an image on the plaques and bringing them down to their eye-level will help to bring the town's history to their notice. They will be able to touch the plaques and this will help them to keep in touch with history," she said.

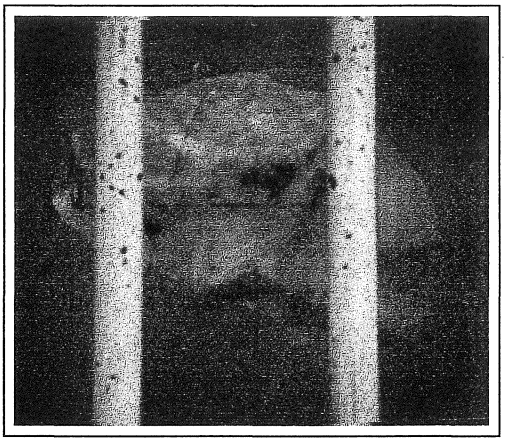
The plaques will also be useful for the visually-impaired and to wheelchair users.

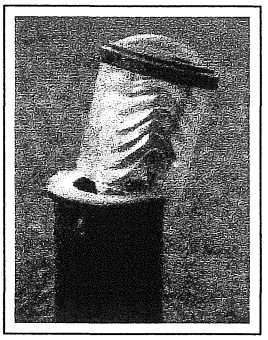
The committee has applied for a £1,000 grant from Monmouthshire County Council and we should know if we have been awarded the money by the middle of August.

Irena Morgan

## VANDALISM AT THE CASTLE



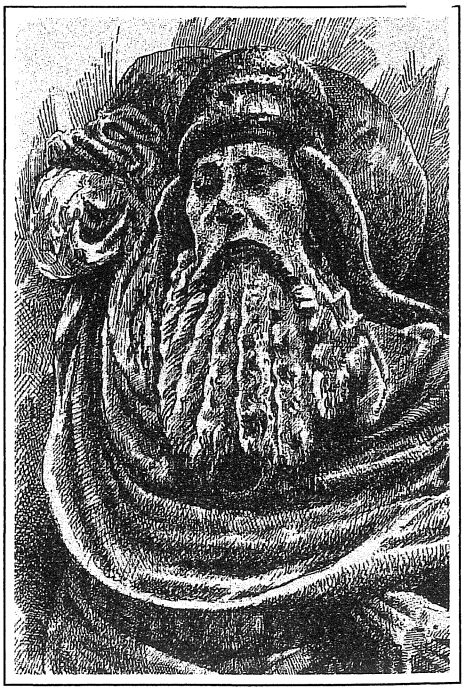




One floodlight was out of action for part of March. The vandals must have used a substantial weapon the ..e of a scaffold pole to aim between the protecting iron bars, break the thick plastic cover and the lantern glass and smash into the bulb and the reflector. They also smashed the walkway lights to the museum and repeated their efforts after they had been repaired. We are grateful to Mr Giles, one of our members, who actually donated the original plastic covers and was able to replace the broken one. We were able to buy a new bulb for some £20 but the special glass cannot be replaced without buying a complete lantern for over £100. We are grateful to the County for replacing a worn out timer and its associated wiring.
We are also grateful to the new tenants of the Lodge who allow us access to one of the timers and the meter. This means that rewiring of all the lights to the Museum can be placed on hold although Howard and I will continue looking at this problem. It is tragic that irresponsible people spoil the generosity and cooperation of so many of our friends.
If you wish to celebrate an occasion you can ring Mary Pullan on 01981 240205 and for £5 you will receive a certificate and the castle will be floodlit for your chosen week

Ken Key

## ST. MARY'S STEWARDING



This is a really useful thing which anyone can do for the church and the town. My late wife Freda began it some 15 years ago. The 41st. rota lists stewarding for the next 14 occasions. If you think the arithmetic doesn't quite add up this is because there has been considerable natural wastage over the years but even if I don't get any more volunteers it still means stewarding for only two hours four times a year.
It is best that two people sit in the church and provide a welcome for visitors and your mere presence discourages vandalism. You will meet many interesting people from all over the world and you may feel encouraged to learn about this wonderful building and its treasures and communicate your knowledge. If you can help please ring Ken Key on 01873 852512

# ABERGAVENNY 1905

Steve McCombie says he wrote this fascinating article for his own amusement! If you are not a Civic Society member you might have missed it. I think it is well worth repeating in this Local History Newsletter. K.A.K.

Ten years ago the Civic Society published the book "Abergavenny in the Twentieth Century". I became intrigued by an Appendix to the book which gave excerpts from a street directory of a hundred years ago.

Despite enquiries in many places I failed to trace the directory from which the data had been taken. A few months later I received a phone call from the Museum who had remembered my original enquiry.

Someone had donated the book I was seeking! This was the "Abergavenny Directory and Year Book for 1906". It was published in May that year by Thomas E Vaughan, a printer in Ledbury, cloth bound for 2/6 or "otherwise" for 1/-. I suspect it failed to make a profit and was never repeated. The publisher admits its compilation was a major task and apologises for its late appearance and any unintended errors. The result of his efforts is a fascinating description of the social structure of our town as it was in 1905. To save you all rushing to the Museum to examine this gem, this article covers the political and institutional aspects of the town at that time.

What makes this Directory unusual is that, unlike contemporary Kelly's Directories which confine themselves to businesses, plus the nobility, gentry, and professional classes who had the money to buy their wares, this Directory lists every house in every street with the name and occupation of the head of household. Many of these jobs would not be available today. Often local businesses inserted fascinating advertisements. Anyone who held public office whether honorary or salaried gets a mention as do the social, religious and sporting associations in the town.

The Social Services of the time are represented by lists of Poor Law Guardians and Overseers for every parish in the Rural District, the staff at the Workhouse and all local people qualified to provide first aid! Six of the seven doctors in the town also appear as honorary medical staff at the Victoria Cottage

Hospital. There was a St John Ambulance Brigade and a District Nursing Fund which involved many ladies. Then there is a detailed chronology of all the major events in Abergavenny throughout 1905. Also in the tradition of almanacs, a few rather weird articles and pictures. The former included "People imprisoned in safes" and "Secrets of the Skeleton Trade"; the latter a sketch of "The sinking of the Knaig Souvoroff- Rojdestvensky's Flagship in the Battle of Tenshina Straits" in the current Russian -Japanese war!

The Directory opens with photographs of the First Freeman of the Borough, the Most Noble The Marquis of Abergavenny K.G. (who reminds me of Bismarck) followed by portraits of all the mayors since the position was created in 1899. No.1 is Alderman Joseph Bishop a local solicitor. The only other portrait is that of Major W .J .R. Marsh of the 4th Volunteer Battalion of the South Wales Borderers appearing in full dress uniform. His premature death at only 35 (not on active service) and the high esteem accorded to men at arms seems to have qualified him for inclusion.

There was, of course, no Civic Society at this time. Perhaps the nearest thing was the Abergavenny Parliamentary Debating Society which met fortnightly in winter. For those wanting greater involvement there was the Town Council. The wards have familiar names - Cantreff (note two fs), Priory, Grofield, Castle. Each supplied three councillors and an alderman. Total 16. Those who feel a present day solitary Town Manager is a bureaucratic burden may be interested to know that the following Council Sub-Committees were deemed necessary: 1. Streets etc. 2. Markets etc. 3. Sanitary and Water, 4. Gas, 5. Finance and General Purposes, 6. Public Library, 7. Parliamentary, 8. Burial Acts Joint (presumably with Rural) 9. Joint Hospital, 10. Extension of Borough Boundary , 11. Town Hall Improvements, 12. Fruit Market Special Committee!

Local tradespeople seem to have predominated as Councillors. Probably they were the only ones that had the time and expertise and could leave others to run their businesses while they ran the town through its plethora of committees. Much work must have been done on a voluntary basis as there is little evidence of public employment. One touching gesture is reported when the Mayor (Councillor G. Watkin) gave a dinner to his workmen in celebration of his appointment as Chief Magistrate of the Borough! The Town Hall Keeper also acted as Market Constable and Corporation Mace Bearer. Another rather splendid public servant was Mr H. G. Restall who was "Vaccination Officer, Assistant Overseer, Collector of Local Rates and of Imperial Taxes".

Abergavenny was the centre of a Petty Sessional Division. The justices met monthly alternately here and in Blaenavon and were 23 in number. They included five with the rank of Major or above, two doctors, the Chairman of the Rural District Council and the Mayor.

At a higher level, Monmouthshire County Council had 17 Aldermen and 48 Councillors and covered an area more akin to the recent Gwent C.C., only Newport as a County Borough with its own administration was excluded. Abergavenny was represented by I. J. Straker who was taking time off from his estate agency which he established in 1872 and then occupied the same premises as his successors do today. 2. J. G Marsh, who resided at St Ronans in Station Road doubtless very convenient for his business as a "Coal, Lime, Timber and General Merchant", 3. R.W. Kennard of Llwyndu Court who was also a Deputy Lieutenant, Justice of the Peace and Vice Chairman of the local Conservative Association. We don't know, as we would now, whether these gentlemen campaigned under party labels but the Directory does tell us quite a lot about the town's political associations.

1 The officers of the North Monmouthshire Constituency Conservative Association comprised 1 most Honourable Marquis, 2 Right Honourable Lords, 1 The Honourable, 2 Deputy Lieutenants, 2 County Councillors and no less than 7 Justices of the Peace. A similar line up occurred in the supporting organisation, the Primrose League (Hendre Habitation 842) headed by the Right Hon. Lord and Lady Llangattock. The organisation was serviced by an Honorary Secretary and Treasurer who was also Chief Agent and lived in Springfield Road. The Conservative Club was then in Baker Street, apparently between the Grofield Inn and a mineral water factory. In sharp contrast, the competing Liberal Association was run by an Alderman, a Councillor (for Castle Ward) and 2 Misters. We are told there was no Liberal Club in the town. Support was provided by the Liberal Social Council who presumably organised fundraising functions.

Most unusually this Council was entirely female presided over by Hon Mrs Herbert of Llanarth. I am afraid that at the Parliamentary level this display of titles and suffixes did little for the Conservative cause. The North Monmouthshire constituency must have covered much of what is now Blaenau Gwent. With almost universal male suffrage by this time and remembering that 1906 had a certain resemblance to 1945 and 1997, it is hardly surprising that the Member of Parliament was one Reginald McKenna, Financial Secretary; to the Treasury in the recently elected Liberal government.

A number of Friendly Societies and infant Trade Unions were established in the town most based at either the Somerset Inn in Merthyr Road, or the Sun Inn in Cross Street. My favourite title is "Bristol, West of England and South Wales Operatives, Trade and Provident Society -Abergavenny Branch." Others reported included:- Crewe Equalised District Order of Druids, Old Merthyr Unity Philanthropic Society; Loyal Gwenynen Gerddi Gwent Lodge MUFS No.1062; Abergavenny Workmen's Hospital Saturday Fund. Almost certainly the largest employer in the town was the London & North Western Railway (which ran to Brecon Road), who based their South Wales operation in Abergavenny. So it is no surprise to find the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants probably a forerunner to the NUR and the Locomotive Steam Enginemen and Firemen's Society presumably a precursor to ASLEF .

Education was provided by a number of schools, some of whose buildings are still in use to this day. Schools listed were, Hereford Road (boys), Victoria Street (mixed), Park Street (probably mixed) and Castle Street (girls). The last three also had departments for infants. At a higher level we had the Abergavenny County Intermediate School for Girls which had no less than 16 managers of whom only 3 were female, despite having only five teachers plus three visiting ones to cover cookery , gymnastics and a master for music and singing shared with the Boys' School. The Headmistress was Miss Houliston, a graduate of Newnham College, Cambridge. In those days the premier qualification for a headship was an M.A. either Oxon or Cantab ideally with a grounding in the classics. Thus the Headmaster of the King Henry VIII Grammar School for Boys was one T. Headland Sifton M.A. a "late Classical Exhibitioner of St John's College, Cambridge". whose home was in Western Road. I sense he would have presented a favourable image with parents and a formidable one with the boys. This school had 14 governors but only 5 schoolmasters. The private sector also included Ty Rholben, Orchard Street, where Frances M. Rogers provided a "Private High Class School for Ladies", and Miss Lena Bird ran a preparatory school for children in Nevill Street.

1905 saw the opening of the Carnegie Library. A pen and ink sketch appears in the Directory looking just like it does today. The Foundation stone was laid by the mayor, the architect, B J Francis, was local and the cost was £2,000! Later in September, we learn that the proceeds taken at the door of Wadbrook's Royal Electrograph (what was this?) amounting to £16 were devoted to the Book Fund of the Free Library .

The first Librarian, Mr Edward Restall, lived very conveniently at 1, Trinity Terrace.

Another important event occurred on 30th August when Lord Roberts unveiled the war memorial in St Mary's Church in memory of the Abergavenny Volunteers who fell in the Boer War. After the event all adjourned to the Market Hall where luncheon was in readiness". The afternoon provided a tournament in Bailey Park and the evening, fireworks in the Castle grounds. Lord Roberts did quite well out of the event too. In addition to hospitality at Nevill Hall, he received a casket, an illuminated address (both illustrated) and the freedom of the Borough.

Religion played a much greater part in people's lives than it does today. Under an advert for "Balls, Suppers and Parties" appears a list of places of worship and religious societies. Of the eleven churches and chapels listed, nine are still active today. The exceptions are the Primitive Methodists (chapel now used by the Salvation Army) and Bethany Baptist Church (now a furniture warehouse). In those days the Salvation Army had their "Barracks" in Tiverton Place. St Mary's as the principal Anglican church had a vicar, surrogate, two curates, organist and sexton. Religious organisations were profuse. There was a Young Men's Institute; Band of Hope; Communicants' Guild; Church Lads Brigade; Girls' Friendly Society; Sunday School Union and the Free Church Council. The YMCA was immensely active "holding services on Saturday and Sunday both morning and night with open air services during summer months in the town and in the villages".

What seems most significant about these days is the tiny contribution of women to public affairs. Although many ran small businesses notably cafes (called refreshment houses!) or even public houses, they took almost no part in public decision making. There is no sign then of a suffragette movement in Abergavenny and even Lady Llanover receives no mention. In short, it was a man's world.

My grateful thanks go to Mr Evans of Victoria Street who donated this extraordinary Directory to the Museum and to the staff there for remembering my interest and providing me with facilities to consult it.

Steve McCombie

## FIVE MISSING MAYORS

The Town Hall displays photographs of all its past Mayors. Unfortunately five are missing!
If anyone can produce photographs of

Samual Deverall 1901
William Davies Woodward 1906
John Gilbert Harris 1913
John Rutland Bekwith 1921
John R Jacobs 1923

please let Douglas Edwards know .01873 855161.

## MILLS OF THE GAVENNY

Some years ago the Society contemplated a project on the Gavenny Mills. We now have a request from Tom Rees for details of a mill in Mill Street once owned by his great grandfather Thomas Rees. We have been unable to find a plaque covered in ivy which he mentions. If you can help please phone Irena Morgan. 01873 853957

## THE CHAPEL ROAD CULVERT

The Council has fitted manholes on this culvert at intervals along its length. Since the culvert is blocked in many places by services to new houses it seems odd that this should have been done. However, it does show that the Council knows about the culvert and has some interest in it.

Ken Key.

## OUR HUSBANDS AND SONS

Aneurin Bevan, the miner M.P. for Ebbw Vale relates in the late 1930's his own experiences of the life of the men and women of the mining villages of South Wales, drawing on reports of the Chief Inspector of Mines and the Miners' Welfare Fund.

I shall never forget the first day that I went down the pit. I was thirteen years of age. My mother begged me not to go. She wanted me to stay at school in order to become a schoolteacher. But I longed to join my companions in the pits, wear long trousers, earn wages and have pocket money to spend at the weekend.
My mother was no exception to the general run of mothers in the mining areas. Few of them want their boys to become miners. Some people imagine that sons of miners become miners as a matter of course. That is true only in the sense that there is hardly any other occupation available in the colliery districts. The morning when the boy puts on his pit clothes for the first time is a proud one for the lad but one of dread and anxiety for the mother. His small wage is an acceptable addition to the meagre family income, and this is usually the sole reason that reconciles her to the necessity.
If she were in the habit of reading the annual reports of the Chief Inspector of Mines her reluctance would be reinforced. For in these she would find in full the story, which the incidents of her daily experience teach her piecemeal.
The Report tells us that there were seven hundred and seventy-one thousand men, boys and women connected with coal mining in 1936, compared with one million, two hundred and fourteen thousand in 1924. Those figures in themselves tell the story of the tragic unemployment, which has afflicted the mining industry in the last decade.
There are, therefore, between three and four million persons directly or indirectly involved in the mining industry. The welfare of so large a community is an important concern for the whole nation.
The accident rate is frightening. Of the 137,163 men and boys killed or injured in the coal mines of this country in 1936, 784 were killed. The following figures will reveal the basis for the fears of the mothers of coal miners: 17,572 boys under twenty years of age were killed or injured; 5,797 were between eighteen and twenty. 7,079 were between sixteen and eighteen, and 4,736 were between fourteen and sixteen years o£ age.
It is customary to think that the miners themselves are responsible for many of the accidents, which occur. It is true that they might be more careful, but the circumstance of their work is their excuse. In most occupations the greatest number of accidents occur in the morning before the worker has freshened up and towards the end of the shift when he is fatigued. These two periods are also the times of the lowest output. The opposite is the case with the miner. Most accidents occur in mining in the middle of the shift. In other work the act of production is at the same time the act of safety precaution. The miner on the other hand has to stop production in order to attend to safety, like putting up props, etc. It is when the miner is most absorbed in production that he is exposed to the greatest risk. Here is an urgent field of inquiry for the Chief Inspector of Mines.
The report of the Mining Industry Welfare fund for the year 1936 is an interesting document. The Welfare Fund was established in 1920 out of the proceeds of — a penny per ton per annum imposed on all coal raised in Great Britain. As its name signifies the purpose of the Fund is to provide money for social amenities for the miners and their families.
At a penny per ton the levy produced a million pounds a year. Splendid work has been done, and much more would have been accomplished if in 1932 the levy had not been reduced to a halfpenny per ton — a change that reduced the annual sum available to five hundred thousand.
Recreation grounds have been made, halls and institutes erected, and a hundred and one other worthy objects assisted, in particular the provision of convalescent homes for the miners and their wives. If one criticism may be made of the administration it is that too little attention has been given to the provision of facilities for the womenfolk.
No single amenity means more to the miner and certainly to his wife than pithead baths. Considerable progress has been made in recent years, but even so many pits are still not equipped. The Report shows that when they are available 92% of the miners use them, and we are told that the demand far exceeds the supply. This is a complete answer to those who said that the miner was too conservative in his habits to want the baths. It is to be hoped that the women in the mining districts where they do not yet exist will bring pressure to bear on the authorities to speed up their installation.

ANEURIN BEVAN

Contributed by Peter Campbell