Abergavenny Local History Society

SHIP'S MASCOT CHATHAM DOCKS

NEWSLETTER No 28

AUGUST 2012

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www.abergavennylocalhistorysociety.org.uk

Charity registration number 1098582

PROGRAMME

2012

Thurs. 27th. Sept	**Prof. Thomas Watkin** LEGAL WALES PAST & PRESENT.
Thurs. 18th. Oct.	**David Maddox** THE TONYPANDY RIOTS 1910-11.
Thurs. 29th. Nov.	**Anne Gatehouse** THE NEWPORT TRANSPORTER BRIDGE. PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE
Dec.	NO LECTURE

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

2013

Thurs. 17th. Jan.	**William Gibbs** ARTISTS OF THE LLANTHONY VALLEY.
Thurs. 21st. Feb.	**Prof. John Hines.** THE COSMESTON ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECT
Thurs 21st. March.	**Roger Foster** CANALS OF SOUTH EAST WALES
Thurs. 25th April. .	**Gwyn Griffiths** THE SHONI ONION MEN
Thurs. 16th. May.	36th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING Followed by : **Frank Olding** Title to be announced

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

CONTACTS

SUMMER VISITS 2013

A booking form will be included with the annual November letter.

Saturday 18 May: Rodmarton Court near Tetbury. Lunch in Stroud. Painswick Rococo Garden; tea there.
Tuesday 4 June: Repeat tour of house at Abbey-cwm-hir requested by members. The ruined Abbey itself can now be visited, by courtesy of CADW. Lunch at Cross Gates. Drive via Radnor Forest to a local church. Tea in Kington.
Afternoon Thursday 20 June: Visit St Fagan's National History Museum.
Evening Tuesday 2 July: Frank Olding's industrial archaeological tour, this time in the Merthyr area. Supper afterwards at the Mountain Air, our usual pub in Trefil.
Friday 26 to Monday 29 July: Normandy. More details at *** below.
Thursday 8 August: Corsham Court. Saxon church in Bradford-on-Avon; lunch in the town. Bath Abbey and a choice of the City's many attractions, including tea.

***NORMANDY LANDINGS WEEKEND, FRIDAY 26-MONDAY 29 JULY 2013:

3-nights bed & breakfast at 3-star hotel in centre of Caen, Normandy. Restaurants nearby. Tour D-Day beaches, battle sites, museums, as well as a viewing of the Bayeux Tapestry.

Friday 26 July: 8 am: coach leaves Fairfield car park
2.45 pm: ferry leaves Portsmouth, evening meal on board
9.30 pm: arrive Caen, coach to hotel

Saturday 27 July to midday Monday 29 July: Tour as above.

Monday 29 July: 3 pm: ferry leaves Caen
9.30 pm: arrive Portsmouth, arrive Abergavenny approx 2 am

Cost Per Person: B&B sharing bedroom, plus coach and ferry: £300
B&B single bedroom, plus coach and ferry: £410
Entrance museums and Bayeux Tapestry: £20 at 2012 rates

Note: Portsmouth/Caen ferry route is longer and dearer than Dover/Calais used for Ypres/Somme battlefields/cemeteries tour last November, hence the increased cost. Hotels also dearer in Normandy, but managed to get £60 knocked off price of Caen hotel -**booking must be confirmed soonest**.
Please phone me, John Skinner (**before 31st August 2012** if you wish to go on this weekend trip. (See reminder on page 14)

BILL RUTTER

After 9 years of guiding us around many fascinating churches, the Rev. Bill Rutter has had to call it a day so he couldn't come with us to Margam Abbey, Ewenny Priory and St Illtud's, Llantwit Major. Local guides at the latter two churches were excellent. I've written to Bill Rutter, thanking him on behalf of History Society members for all he did for us, have visited him at his home and will keep in touch with him.

LATE NEWS

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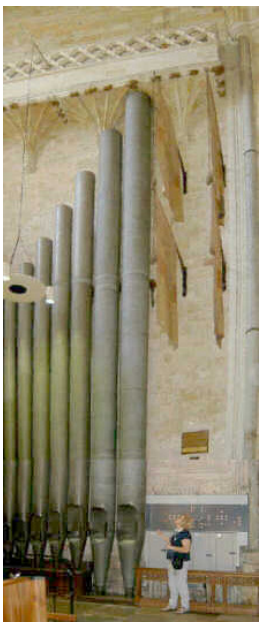
We have just had a fantastic weekend in Devon and David Powell guided us expertly round Stokesay Castle and Much Wenlock Priory, but more of this in next year's newsletter.



Gill at Exeter Cathedral

We remain indebted **to Mrs Margot Seabourne** for everything she does visits-wise.

WORK SHARING
David Powell is guiding the tour on 9th August this year. **David Phillips**, a committee member, will kindly lead some visits in 2013 et seq. and will help me organise future visit programmes. Their help is greatly appreciated.

A VOLUNTEER is sought to print and mail two letters annually: my letter to members sent in early November each year that confirms the visit programme for the following year and encloses a booking form, etc., and also Margot Seabourne's letter to members that allocates places on visits or notifies members that they are on the waiting list when a visit is over-subscribed. Would volunteers kindly contact me. Many thanks
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LOOKING BACK
In last year's newsletter we were looking forward to visiting Highclere Castle, where the TV series Downton was staged. Its Egyptian Museum certainly didn't disappoint.
We visited Sir Winston Churchill's home at Chartwell, Rochester Cathedral, Chatham's Historic Dockyard, Dover Castle, Richborough's Roman Fortified Port, Canterbury Cathedral and Hever Castle, Anne Boleyn' s childhood home.

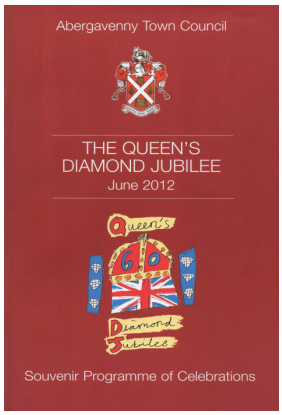
So far in 2012 we've been to Chedworth Roman Villa; truly impressive archaeology. The breed of large pink-shelled snails brought over by the Romans still breed there. In the afternoon we eventually found the much heralded Hidcote Manor Garden. Eastnor Castle proved very popular as well with those who went.

Frank Olding's tour of Garnderys in 2010 was oversubscribed and for those who accompanied him a most memorable occasion. Sadly, this summer's repeat tour was badly rain-affected, but the pub supper afterwards went down well.

John Skinner, Visits Organiser

Beacons, Bands and Bunting - Royal Jubilee Celebrations in Abergavenny

Abergavenny has a long tradition of celebrating royal Jubilees with enthusiasm. The three celebrated for Elizabeth II all followed a similar style – lots of bunting, parties for children and old people, a procession through town, fireworks and events in the Castle grounds and Bailey Park over several days and of course the presentation of Jubilee mugs and the lighting of beacons. The Silver Jubilee in 1977 had the addition of a coach and horses on a Jubilee tour collecting for the Jubilee fund. There was an ox-roast run by the Lions Club at the Castle with entertainments and a television marquee so that those who wanted to could watch the Cup Final.



The Silver Jubilee of King George V and Queen Mary in May 1935 came at a time of high unemployment and 24 of the unemployed offered their services for the preparations for the Jubilee. Collections were made for the Jubilee Trust Fund and the festivities began on Saturday 4 May with distribution of half crown coins to the unemployed and the "Aged Poor of the Borough". Jubilee Day - Monday 6 May was made a Bank Holiday. The bells of St Mary's were rung and a motor car and bicycle rally processed through the town accompanied by the Borough Band. The King spoke on BBC radio in the evening before lighting the first beacon.

Abergavenny museum

The Abergavenny Boy Scouts built a bonfire on the Deri and the day finished with the Jubilee Ball and dancing into the early hours. During the week there was a programme of events including a band concert and community singing in Bailey Park, a concert in the Town Hall for elderly people, a rugby match, a whist drive and a charabanc trip for old age pensioners. For children there were sports events in the park and entertainments at the Castle. The week ended with a thanksgiving service at St Mary's.

Queen Victoria's Silver Jubilee in 1862 was not celebrated as it came too soon after the death of Prince Albert. However for her Golden Jubilee in 1887 things were very different. On 21 June a dinner was provided for the aged poor and tea for children. Dinners consisted of beef, veal and mutton, vegetables, plum pudding and tarts. The teas included plum pudding and spice cake. Donations were made to the bonfire fund as it was planned to have a beacon and fireworks on the Sugarloaf that could be seen fifty miles around. There was a bonfire on the Blorenge too and from some places spectators could see 20-30 bonfires, all lit at 10pm after the signal rockets went up to announce the official start. There was a programme of sports including more than 20 races, which took place in Bailey Park. Flags and banners festooned the town and there were three triumphal arches - opposite the L & NW Railway station, in Frogmore Street and Cross Street. A procession led by Maindiff Court Band included the H Company of the Volunteers and the Fire Brigade on their new engine drawn by 4 horses ridden by postilions in blue uniforms. They were followed by schoolchildren and by wagons carrying children too young to walk. A second procession of employees of the L & NW Railway following their own band arrived at the cattle market soon after and the display of banners and flags, men in uniform, the three bands and children in their best clothes made a memorable display.

Diamond jubilees celebrate the 60th anniversary of a monarch and the 75th anniversary for everyone else, so it was her Diamond Jubilee that Queen Victoria celebrated in 1897. The Abergavenny Executive Committee put an advertisement in the Chronicle of 14th June asking for donations for a dinner for old persons and a tea for schoolchildren. A list of donors appeared in the following weeks paper when £77 14s 8d had been collected. The town's decorations included a floral arch in Victoria Street and an illuminated "VR" on the Brecon Road railway bridge. Local shops sold Jubilee goods – Strawsons the Drapers had a great show of Jubilee Novelties and the Decker Bakery in Monk Street invited orders for 'Diamond Jubilee' cake, ornamented or plain. On the Sunday the celebrations started with a service at St Mary's followed by the procession of distinguished local people to the town hall. Three thousand Jubilee Medals were distributed. The Jubilee Day procession set off from the Bailey Park with decorated bicycles in the lead and representatives of all local organisations and tradespeople. It all looked very jolly with the Band and Volunteer Corps in their uniforms, bakers and pastry cooks wore their whites and there were butchers, carpenters and a chimney sweep with his cart, all in their working attire. At one o'clock about 400 of 'the indigent poor' were served with an excellent hot dinner in the Market Hall. The children's sports took place in Bailey Park after which they repaired to the Market Hall for tea. There was a misunderstanding in the evening where it had been planned that the Committee and their friends should arrive for a ceremony of carving and serving of the Jubilee roast ox. The remainder was to be distributed to the poor at 8 o'clock, but when the Committee arrived at 6 o'clock it was found that not only had there been no tables kept free for them but the roast ox had already been cut up and distributed to the hungry crowd. There was dancing to a band in the park and a display of fireworks. At five minute to ten a signal rocket went up and the beacons were lit. Up to 100 beacons were visible from the top of Skirrid.

It is a point to ponder, that one of the original meanings of the Jewish 'Jubilee' was a time, every 50 years, of returning property to its original owner or their heirs, thus ensuring the fair distribution of wealth among the people.
Sue Smith.

Reminiscences of the School, 1858--62.

By the Rev. H.A. JAMES, C.H., D.D.
President of St John's College. Oxford.

In the summer of l858 my father, then Rector of Panteg, told me that I was to go to school, and that he had determined to send me to the Grammar School at Abergavenny. He wished me to gain a scholarship at Jesus Col1ege Oxford. The scholarships there were mostly confined to natives of Wales, but were open also to boys who had been educated at one or other of four or five schools, of which Abergavenny was one. As I was born in England, it was necessary that I should spend four years as a pupil at one such school; and to Abergavenny I went on my l4th birthday, August 3rd, l858.

To get from my home at Panteg I had to walk somewhat over a mile to Pontypool Road Station and then take a train to Abergavenny. There was a convenient train at 8.30 a.m., which landed me at Abergavenny station about 9. This made me a few minutes late every day, but that could not be helped. Many a time I had a race with the train which I could see steaming along on the other side of the valley, but during the whole of this time I never missed it except on one occasion when the time of its departure was altered by a few minutes without notice and I remember well the anger of a business man from Pontypool who was in the same case as myself. We were, at his demand, sent on in the guard's van of a goods train: I rather enjoyed the fun.

On another occasion I witnessed a scene which was anything but fun! I had got into the Abergavenny train, when we heard a prolonged whistling coming from some distance away on the branch line from Crumlin, and on looking in that direction we saw a goods train making headway for Pontypool Road at a terrific pace. Just paral1el with us was an island platform and on the other side of this the runaway train rushed on, and became invisible by reason of the dust which it raised. A few yards further on was a cutting, and hardly had it entered this when we heard a loud crash. At once we rushed to the scene, only to see the engine on its side and the rails for the railway with which it was laden, bent like straws, and thrown on to the banks. Luckily, the engine driver and stoker managed to escape serious injury. But enough of my adventures as a passenger on my way to school.

The Headmaster of those days was the Rev. Henry Peake, a former scholar of Jesus' College, Oxford. He was a kindly chief, if a somewhat stern disciplinarian who used occasiona1ly to inflict a severe caning upon an erring pupil in the presence of the whole school. I was never punished in this way, though I had a narrow escape, for I had been "cheeked" by another boy, and took matters into my own hands in the matter of retaliation. For all this, we greatly liked Mr. Peake. But 'scholar' in the 'technical' sense, he was not. He heard us in translation from Euripides, Herodotus, Cicero, Virgil, and Horace, but he never set any of his senior pupils an English passage to turn into Latin or Greek, still less into verse in those languages; and when I left, at 18, I was 'doing' 'Ellis' Exercises, which were simple translations from Cicero to be retranslated into Latin, and Bland's Latin verse, a fourth form book, at most: a hopeless outlook for a boy who was aiming at a scholarship at the University.

Mr. Peake had a peculiar method of marking. You got three marks for punctual attendance, and three more for translation quite independently of the accuracy or value of the work. What I did learn was the meaning of a considerable number of Latin, Greek and French words, and a fair knowledge of the elementary grammar of these languages.

The Grammar School of those days was held in the old Church, dedicated to St. John. Whether it had been desecrated or unconsecrated, I know not. All the internal fittings had been removed, and replaced by two long blocks of desks, each block having a number of separate desks opposite to each other: of these each boy had one. At the far end, at a higher desk, sat the Headmaster, and it was here that he heard our lessons, and looked down the hall with a view to discipline. About ha1f-way down, but looking across the building, sat the one Assistant Master, Mr. George Peake, the Headmaster's son. He had charge of the Euclid and arithmetic of the School, and of the general studies of the junior boys. I cannot call him a gifted teacher, but he was the best of all good fellows, straight and true and just. I retained his friendship to the day of his death. He owed his popularity to his real kindness of heart and interest in his pupils, as well as to his great prowess as a cricketer: the Abergavenny C.C. had no worthier champion as bat, bowler, and field (he cou1d throw 100 yards).

When I joined the School, there were four boarders living with the Headmaster - James George, and Ralph Peake, relatives of his, and W. Fancourt (afterwards, I think, a clergyman in the South of England). They all left before very long, but were then succeeded by F. A. Howard, Dartford and Aubrey Mercer (brothers) and Keppel Foote. The boarders took little part in the general life of the School, but, as I had my lunch at the

Headmaster's house, I saw something of them, but I have quite lost sight of them since. One thing, however, I remember well, I learnt my cricket at the Headmaster's house. The house had a yard, on which we pitched a wicket but the bounds were severe, within a yard or two of the batsman was a barn, which effectively prevented any productive leg-hitting. To the off was a shrubbery, and beyond that a road. What was worse, between mid-off and coverpoint was the boarders' study, with glass doors, and it was inevitable that a hit in that direction would result in a breakage, which the batsman had to make good from his pocket-money. The ball we played with was an india-rubber one with a wooden core, which soon lost its elasticity, especially when it was cut into by coming into collision with the edges of the slates on the roof of the pantry. But one learnt a little, notwithstanding, of the art of batting.

Among my day-boy contemporaries were my dear old friend, John Williams, who came to school at my father's suggestion, when over 20, to begin his preparation for Holy Orders. (He was afterwards a vicar in Yorkshire, and father of the present Bishop of Carlisle). Another who, though no kinsman, bore the same name, William Williams, every Saturday used to walk home to Crickhowell, and back again on the Monday. Others were Robert Farquhar, son of a neighbouring Vicar; T. L. Evans, a native of the town, who was quite a useful cricketer. Then there was Evan Edwards, son of the Vicar of Llanhilleth, a strong, well-made Welshman, afterwards a clergyman in Yorkshire. I shall never forget a fight into which he was forced, with a boy who, though a good deal smaller than himself, came to the school rather late in point of age, and with a reputation as a boxer. The Welshman simply made mince-meat of him! There are two other schoolfellows whom I well "remember: one the Rev. W. Evans, who became Vicar of Tregare, near Raglan, and one, whose loss was deeply deplored by his fe1low-townsmen, John Marsh, citizen and once Mayor of Abergavenny. If the number of those I have singled out for mention does not seem large, it must not be forgotten that when I went to the School in 1858 there were only 32 boys there, and when I left it, in 1862, that number had dropped to 17... I am delighted to know of its present much enlarged proportions and success.

I have mentioned above the fact that I had to travel by a rather early morning train every day from Pontypool Road. Some time in 1862 the railway company altered its time-table and the start of the train was put back to somewhere about 7 am or earlier. This was too much and my father made arrangements for me to take lodgings in Abergavenny. My great friends, John and William Williams and William Evans, were lodging with an old lady named Mrs. Jenkins, who lived near the bottom of the hill leading to the station, but who afterwards removed to a more commodious house in Frogmore Street. There I joined my friends. Almost the only other lodger was an old gentleman who consumed large quantities of Vichy water, the bottles of which were much in evidence.

Evans and I thought ourselves musicians, and used occasionally to try over some hymn-tunes or chants - a harmless diversion, but our fellow-lodger lodged a protest with our landlady, and we had (for her sake - she was a kindly old person) to discontinue the practice!

We had, each of us, to find the meat for our mid-day meal, and I might often have been seen bearing the necessary chop or steak in a bit of newspaper as we walked from school! Our evenings were sometimes spent at "Penny Readings," which were then much in vogue, and our afternoons, until winter came, on the cricket-field. Once, I remember, the Headmaster invited me to an evening party. We played at a game consisting of question and answer, i.e., you were supplied with a question, and had to write an answer in verse. I remember, still, my answer to the question " What is the difference between wit and wisdom? "

" Wisdom's a jewel; in wit you may set it.
If you want any more, don't you wish you might get it? "

With which remark I think I may very well conclude these rambling reminiscences. It was a happy time, if not a very fruitful one, except that it furnished me with several life-long friends. I never succeeded in attaining the object with which my father sent me to Abergavenny, a scholarship at Jesus College, but that, as it happened, was all to the good, for that college was not, at that time, the efficient one which it is now, and I was elected to another, to which I owe all that is best in my subsequent career, at Lincoln College. One fact I had all but forgotten to mention. Every year, at Mid-summer, a sum of £10 was awarded, in four amounts of £2-10-0 each, by examiners from Jesus College, Oxford. I got one of these every year, and they constituted my only pocket money for the year, for my father allowed me none!

I am indebted to Bryn Seabourne for passing me this extract from The Gobannian No1 January 1929

I have done a little editing to get it into two pages.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

On behalf of the society I would like to thank all members of the Society, especially the committee, who have worked hard during the year.

As part of risk management, we decided to up-date our constitution using the most recent Charity Commission's draft constitution and to ask all committee members to sign the official "fit and proper persons document", as they, as trustees, are responsible for managing quite large sums of money.

Our electricity suppliers reclassified the Society as a small business. (We pay for Abergavenny Castle to be floodlit). Oliver Russell negotiated with the electricity company and managed to obtain a reduction, as we are a registered charity.

Our thanks go to Oliver for maintaining such high standards in our financial affairs and dealing with the Charity Commission.

Helen Morgan, as secretary, has continued to provide the Focus monthly magazine with articles and has given the committee accurate minutes.

Marian Senior and Dai Morgan found excellent lecturers during the year and you will see that they have a good lecture programme for next season.

We also have good support in the Borough theatre from the technical staff, Ioan and Andrew, for which Ken Key, Robert Bender and I operating the audio-visual aids are often thankful.

Jane White and Jeanette Butt continue to provide Fairtrade tea and coffee after lectures.

Thank you also to all our volunteer fire stewards and card checkers. I know some of you find it a nuisance to have to remember your membership cards, but it does mean that those of you who pay your subscriptions are not also paying for others who do not.

Our Membership Secretary, Sue Smith continues to keep tabs on our members (380 currently), keeps them informed by email and post and works hard for the Society in the background.

The research she has been co-ordinating and carrying out is almost at an end, and I would like to thank Janet Constable, Elizabeth Dunkley, Christina Lawrence, Sarah Gascoigne, Nola Bates, Lavinia O'Brien, Chris Turvey (and sometimes Gill Wakley), for their hard work as they move onto their next project.

Paddy Beynon continues, with occasional help, to maintain the Castle garden, which has been looking lovely. She is also on the desk in the foyer, selling DVDs and books, and arranging the sponsorship for the floodlighting.

Thank you also to John Skinner who continues to find interesting venues for the visits programme and Margot Seabourne who carries out a difficult job managing the lists of those going on the visits, with many withdrawals and replacements, and of managing the finances.

Rachael Rogers has made many innovations at Abergavenny Museum and provides a stimulating programme of exhibitions and displays. 28, 705 people visited the museum in financial year 2011/12, compared with 26,225 for 2010/11. The Museum Service has been awarded a grant to improve the documentation of collections across all three museums and a temporary worker funded for this project. There is a new dressing up box of clothes in the Keep Gallery – Roman, medieval and Victorian –a mixture of boys and girls and rich and poor.

Our projects for the coming year include book publishing. *Discovering Abergavenny: Archaeology and History* by Frank Olding is a completely up-dated and revised version of his earlier *Archaeology of Abergavenny* which is now out of print.

We are publishing two information booklets, one about Abergavenny Castle, the other to accompany a new display "Treasures of the Museum" in June. A book about Charcoal Burning in Fforest Coalpit by Shirley Rippin is in the pipeline.

We have contributed towards the renewal of the information panels in Abergavenny Castle.

We are investigating putting an information panel in Linda Vista Gardens about the carved tree trunk that illustrates episodes in the history of Abergavenny.
We are also hoping to add to our ceramic plaques and are co-operating with local schools with assistance from Jane White.

We are grateful to our walk leaders, Dai and Helen Morgan, David and Carol Jenkins (and your chairman), who led the four guided walks around the eastern area of Abergavenny. We had a great deal of extra information from knowledgeable local participants. We also led guided walks around our ceramic and stone plaques for the public and booked groups and a walk for the Monmouthshire Walking Festival in October. This coming summer, the walk leaders have been joined by David and Carol Phillips and are planning to walk every Monday in July and August around the Norman and Medieval town and a new "Over the bridge" guided walk has been researched for this year. The latter will run on June 24th, July 21st and August 19th and look at old routes – tramway, rail and road – into Abergavenny and the industrial hub of Llanffwyst. Members are welcome on these walks, which are free and full of information about our town. Our website offers guided walks to groups and a couple of organisations have already booked up.

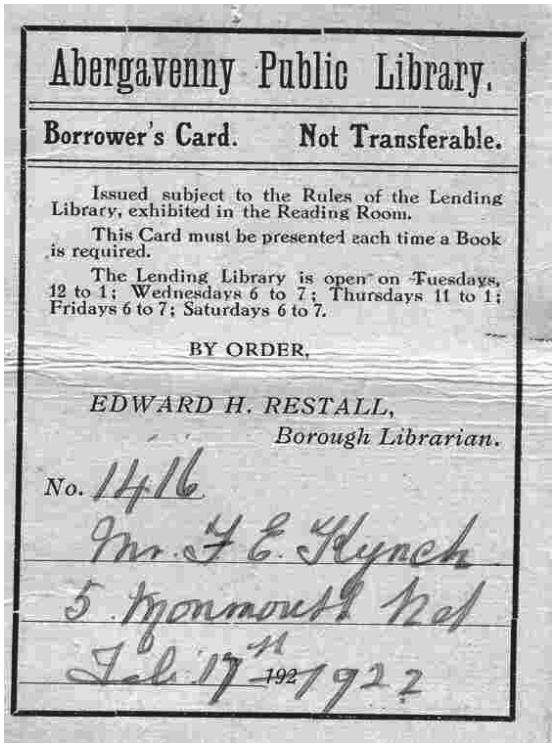
Helen and Dai Morgan and I represented the society at the Abergavenny Eisteddfod and the society donated one of the prizes, as we will do again in June this year. The society gave an award to Beth Jenkins who wishes to do post-graduate research after gaining a first class honours degree in History. Some of you will remember that she attended King Henry VIIIth school. Ellis Lawrence from King Henry VIIIth also received an award towards books, as he is going on to study history at Manchester University.

As many of you will remember, the Angel celebrated the 100th anniversary of their inclusion in the first edition of the Michelin Guide last year and the society put on an exhibition with the help of the Museum and I gave a short talk on what visitors might have encountered in Abergavenny that year.

The website www.abergavennylocalhistorysociety.org.uk continues to develop, thanks to Sue Smith and others for their input to the website. All the newsletters from past years are now available and make fascinating reading. Ken Key and Sue Smith work very hard on the newsletters, and are always pleased to receive possible articles.

Gill Wakley Chairman May 2012

LIBRARY TICKET



Abergavenny Public Library.

Borrower's Card. Not Transferable.

Issued subject to the Rules of the Lending Library, exhibited in the Reading Room.

This Card must be presented each time a Book is required.

The Lending Library is open on Tuesdays, 12 to 1; Wednesdays 6 to 7; Thursdays 11 to 1; Fridays 6 to 7; Saturdays 6 to 7.

BY ORDER,

EDWARD H. RESTALL,
Borough Librarian.

No. 1416
Mr. F. E. Flynch
5 Monmouth Rd
Feb 17th ~~192~~ 1922

Freda Key found this relic of old times and almost certainly intended it to go to the museum.
I wonder if any of the family still lives in Abergavenny and would recognise the holder.

IN FLANDERS FIELDS 2011

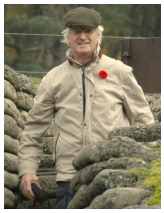
In November, 30 members of our Society were privileged to visit Ypres, the Belgian town that features on our Frogmore Street War Memorial. The rest of this article describes just a few of the profoundly moving reactions and reflections our tour in the area inspired.

Bryn Seabourne

This was 'Wipers' to my dad and 3 brothers, all of whom miraculously survived the carnage which wiped out much of their generation. This was being in touch, in a multitude of different ways for everyone in the party, with those momentously tragic events that still cast a shadow. This was getting beyond the clichés, the commentaries and the generalities so that, as far as is humanly possible almost a century on, we were there. For this there is no substitute. Only on site can the magnitude of the catastrophes be even partly appreciated.
The quantity of information of all kinds is inexhaustible. It was revealing, for instance, to learn at the Cloth Hall of the Belgian side of things. And a memory I treasure is of the French café where we had a baguette lunch. No pretensions. Just ready for some Tommy to strike up "Mademoiselle from Armentières….."

George Smith

It was particularly poignant for me driving past Hellfire corner where my father fought. He was a corporal in the South Wales Borderers and saw action at Hellfire Corner and elsewhere on the Somme. He was hit by shrapnel when coming out of a dugout to post a letter. The Germans changed the sequence of shelling on a crossroads, where he was hit. In fact, he had shrapnel in him until the day he died, as it was too deep to remove in those days. He had a pension of 7/6d a week for life. At the time he was in the Machine Gun Corps.



Margaret Smith

My grandmother's brother Arthur Gibbons was in the Lancashire Fusiliers and died in October 1917. I photographed his name and details on the memorial at Tyne Cot during the visit. Other relations killed in WWI were grandfather's brother, Oliver Pembridge from Forest Coalpit, a gunner killed in the Pas de Calais May 1917, and his brother Peter, from the South Wales Borderers. So the tour, although sad, was particularly fruitful for George and Margaret

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Margot Seabourne
THIEPVAL AND POZIÈRES

My grandfather was wounded by shrapnel in the head and his brother Jim was killed on the Somme. They and their cousin, all coal miners, had joined up together in 1914 and served together in the Green Howards. Family folklore tells that my grandfather Bob and his brother Jim were on a night patrol in No Man's Land when the enemy opened fire and they all scattered to their trench. When they got back, Bob was safe, but Jim had been killed. A few days later, Bob was wounded and bore the bumps from the shrapnel wounds on his bald head until he died. I found Jim's name on the Thiepval Memorial and left a poppy cross there.
I also left a poppy cross on the Pozières memorial for my grandmother's brother, John George Cotton from the Northumberland Fusiliers, killed on the first day of the second Battle of the Somme.

I had never known these two men, both killed long before I was born, but the sadness of the families they left behind was painful to imagine. My father said that his aunt never got over her loss. I was grateful for the opportunity the trip provided for me to visit their memorials.

Mary Hulme
IMPRESSIONS OF TYNE COT

This was not my first visit to Tyne Cot Cemetery. I remember being greatly moved in the Eighties at the sight of this vast army of white headstones but more so this time.
The entrance is now through the visitor centre, built July 2006, and as one approaches along a narrow path one becomes aware of a voice, almost ethereal, at intervals along the path, speaking the names and ages of men killed in action at the horrific battle of Passchendaele. It seems like a voice from the past.

In the museum a video rolls continuously, revealing images of all those lost soldiers, many so very young, emphasising the tragic waste of life and the futility of the whole ghastly episode in our history. An immense window provides the visitor with a panoramic view over the battlefields where one tries to imagine what went on there over 90 years ago.
A path leads from the visitor centre around the perimeter wall of the cemetery itself, giving a greater impression of its huge extent, and allowing a view over the wall of row upon row of white headstones. Half way around is the main entrance, once the only entrance, leading in amongst the graves, immaculately kept and with roses still blooming although early November.
After spending time there one leaves as if through the wall at the back, a huge, semi-circular wall on which are written thousands of names of soldiers whose remains were never found.
It is now so peaceful there - a truly remarkable and fitting memorial.

Liz & John Bartlett

We had visited Passchendaele and the Somme some twenty years ago: however, the sheer scale of the carnage is beyond belief and continues to stir many mixed emotions about the waste of lives through lack of informed direction by the military hierarchy. On our return to the area the most poignant things for me were: The Menin Gate service and Talbot House.

The Menin Gate service, led by the UK Police Band, and the involvement of many English schools was very moving and there were many tears being shed that evening. The sheer scale of the 'lost' soldiers is almost beyond comprehension.

Talbot House. You may think that the film about the' Happy Hoppers' is an unusual thing to become nearly reduced to tears by - but the private soldier (an actor) who sang the touching portrayal of the battle field casualties said more than one can imagine. (To see and hear the song, Google "Happy Hoppers Talbot House.")

Hazel Buchanan

THE STORY OF TALBOT HOUSE POPERINGHE

In November I joined the Abergavenny History Society trip to the First World War battlefields. Amongst the many places we visited was the club known as Talbot House, in the town of Poperinghe on the edge of the Ypres Salient. Situated in the centre of the town, it was owned at the start of the war by a wealthy brewer. In December 1915 the back of the house was hit by German shrapnel and the brewer removed his family to safety, renting his house to the British Army.

As it was situated a few miles from the battle lines it seemed an ideal place for men weary of fighting, or returning to the front after home leave to spend a few hours resting and recuperating.

Chaplains Philip "Tubby" Clayton and Neville Talbot took on the task of making the house a club for all ranks. A sign over the door says "All rank abandon, ye who enter here". The club was furnished by donations of furnishings, books etc. from local people and from groups in Britain. The name was to be Church House, but Talbot felt that this would deter many soldiers from using the house. It was decided to name it "Talbot House" in memory of Neville's brother Lt. Gilbert Talbot, killed on the Ypres Salient aged 23. Guests soon shortened this to "TOC H", the signallers' form of 'T' and 'H'.

The complex had a large chapel in the loft, concert hall, dining rooms, bedrooms, bathhouse, lending library and lovely garden. During the war the house was used by countless soldiers en route to or from the front and provided a haven of peace and cleanliness, which was missing in the trenches where they lived and fought, and a place to meet friends or relations in other units.

The owner returned after 1918 but was overwhelmed, as the house was constantly being visited by British soldiers, so he sold it in 1929 for £9,200 to Lord Wakefield of Hythe who gave it to the Talbot House Association.

In the Second World War, when the Germans occupied the town, the local people stripped the house of all its furnishings and belongings and hid them for the duration. The house itself was the German H.Q. and Officers' Mess. They did not realise there was a secret tunnel under the garden taking aircrew across the border! After the war the local people returned all the furniture and contents.

The house continues to be maintained by TOC H and the chapel, concert hall, bath house and gardens are restored and refurbished. A wonderful museum has been opened next door to the house, telling its history. Short video films featuring residents of the town tell what it was like to live as children through the occupation.

If you do your own Battlefields Tour it is possible to rent rooms in the house on a self-catering basis. All visitors are welcomed with a cup of tea and biscuit, provided by British and Belgian volunteers who stay at the house for a few weeks at a time to look after the guests.

Hazel Buchanan

THE CHINESE LABOUR CORPS IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR

At Toc H, I watched short videos featuring very elderly Poperinghe residents. These captured personal memories of their childhood in World War One.

One tale concerned Chinese soldiers. Titled "Poor Souls," it fascinated me. I had never realised there were Chinese soldiers fighting in the First World War in France and Belgium. The Belgian lady said that the soldiers were like lost souls, wore long pigtails, long clothes and were helpful and polite.

When I reached home I was determined to find out more and – thanks to the internet – I learned a great deal. Apparently in 1916 Field Marshal Haig requested that 21,000 labourers be recruited to fill the manpower shortage caused by war casualties. As the Chinese were not at war at that time, their government did not allow them to participate in the fighting. China did declare war on Germany and Austria-Hungary on 14th August 1917.

50,000 Chinese labourers were recruited as non-combatants first by the French. The British government contracted in 1916 to form the Chinese Labour Corps to serve in France. It started operations in 1917.

Eventually 140,000 men from China worked with the Allies. The British and Americans treated them very badly. They were used almost as slave labour, were not allowed out of the camps, were paid a pittance, were only allowed to write home twice a month, were not allowed to celebrate Chinese holidays and were subjected to a great deal of racial discrimination. Although they were not legally military workers they were expected to obey strict military laws and were not allowed to wear civilian clothing except their hats. The French Army, however, treated the Chinese with respect and dignity, abiding by their work contracts, giving them both Chinese and French holidays and working well with them.

The Chinese cleared mines, repaired roads, unloaded ships, worked in the armament factories and were largely treated as coolies and cheap labour. After the war they could not return home immediately but spent up to two years burying the dead, filling in trenches and clearing grenades and bullets.

One good consequence of being in the war situation was that several hundred Chinese students had been sent over with the labourers to act as translators. These students drew up education plans and set up very basic schools for the workers in their spare moments away from the battlefields. Almost two thirds of the workers were able to read when they eventually were sent home.

After the end of the war the "official" number of Chinese dead was given as around 2,000, many dying from a direct result of enemy action, some as a result of wounds received in the course of duty and the remainder of Spanish flu. But Chinese records show 20,000 deaths whilst 10,000 graves, marked in Chinese characters lie in 30 French graveyards, silent witnesses to a shamefully neglected sacrifice.

THE MUSEUM GARDEN

The year started rather badly with the disappearance sometime in January of the Silver Hedgehog holly, which had been planted in 2010 to replace the beech sapling that had seeded itself opposite the large yew tree. Variegated shrubs are generally less vigourous in growth, it had had to contend with the bitter winter of 2010/2011, and being in the shade of the yew tree it was still small in size. Presumably it is now gracing someone's garden as I could find no trace of it around the museum grounds.

On a happier note the garden has recovered after having to be used as access for rebuilding the path leading up to the original museum entrance. This path has been widened to allow wheelchair access to the museum, and has meant the loss of the strip alongside which has been planted up each summer by pupils from Deri View School. The top of the wall between the path and the garden was rebuilt which resulted in large stones falling into the garden and consequent damage to the shrubs beneath. The contractors are reimbursing us for the plants.

A big thank you to Lavinia O'Brien who volunteered to help in the garden on a regular basis. Between us we dug over the by then badly compacted and wet soil and replanted. The main shrub was a really lovely dark red rhododendron, we also replaced the pink Bleeding hearts, *Dicentra specabilis,* and some bush Chrysanthemums. A strip has been dug alongside the path again and planted with red annual poppies and antirrhinums.

The Civic Society had a meeting in June on the 'Green Spaces' of Abergavenny, and asked for short presentations from the Friends of Linda Vista and Bailey Park, the Hill garden, the community orchard and the Museum garden. I was surprised to find during the questions after my talk that many of the Civic Society members had not noticed the museum garden or did not know of its existence!

As all gardeners say: "there is always next year"

PADDY BEYNON

Enjoying the fete on July 25 1902 in the Castle Grounds

Extract from the Abergavenny Chronicle found during our searches for information, amended and augmented by Gill Wakley

The members of the congregation of St Mary's Church, aided by friends from other congregations, held a pretty open air fete in aid of St Mary's curacy fund in the Castle Grounds. The grounds were tastefully decorated at night illuminated under the general direction of Mr. JC Gwatkin who ran the catering in the castle.

The whole of the upper terrace overlooking the tennis court was appropriated for the garden under the management of several of the ladies of the congregation, with little tables dotted along the terrace. This was enclosed by a row of Venetian masts & shorter flag staffs connected by wires from which depended coloured glass lamps of various colours.
The centre of the terrace approached by steps from the tennis court was covered with a canvas awning, stretching from the wall which divides the terrace for the tennis court from that of the lower court generally used for such games as Bobby Bingo, rounders, etc. The Venetian Masts were covered with greenery. The lower lawn was devoted to shying at coconuts. In a secluded part of the grounds Senora Zita, a world renowned scientific palmist, held sessions.

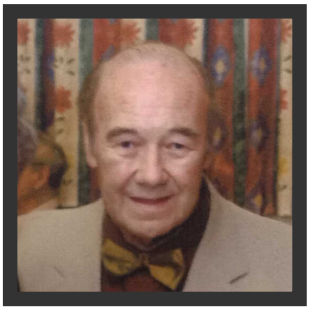
Then there was croquet pool. In croquet, the object is to shoot your ball through a series of hoops, and then knock a wicket at the end of the course. This outdoor sport was transferred to a table to be played indoors. Many of the early game tables also had hoops or pins to knock a ball through like croquet, and some did not. In the revised version of the table croquet or pool, the object was often to knock your player's ball with the cue ball and then have it bounce off the side to strike another ball. This type of cue sports (called Carom billiards) are still around today and are played on billiard tables without pockets. But early on, it did not take long for holes to be added to the tables as a replacement to obstacles with a net under the hole to catch the ball.

A ping pong tournament could be entered for an entrance fee of 1s. You could also try your skill in a butterfly competition, making button holes or a bouquet stand. Other contests to enter were to trim a hat - and a washing competition (was this clothes or washing up?). The golf putting and egg and spoon race were popular. The Banqueting Hall was fitted up as a theatre with Pierrot entertainment, very popular at that time.

Maypole dancing on the grass was performed by the maids from school to the strains of a piano lent by Messrs Heins. The Blaenavon silver band played dance & other music.

I think it must have looked quite splendid.

If anyone has any pictures of entertainment events in the castle between 1880 and 1960, or any reliable information, the research group of the ALHS would like to hear from you. Please contact Gill Wakley or Sue Smith.



We express our condolences to Myrtle and all the family of **PETER CAMPBELL M.B.E** who passed away recently.
The first issue of the newsletter names Peter as a member of the first Plaques Subcommittee responsible for the many historic plaques throughout the town.
Freda Key was always most grateful for his help when she was treasurer of the Society. Peter was Society treasurer in the years 1994-5 and 1995-6.

GIFT AID

If you have signed a Gift Aid form for your membership subscriptions, please remember to let the Membership Secretary know if your circumstances have changed so you no longer pay Income Tax. For couples it is only necessary for the person actually paying the subscription to be a tax-payer. Annual subscriptions are still only £10 per person and you can renew any time by getting your subscription to the Membership Secretary (contact details are on your Membership Card) or at the next lecture.

Oliver Russell

NEWSLETTER

I am grateful to all those who have sent contributions and photographs for the newsletter. A week or so ago we were very short of copy and I started writing it myself. However, contributions arrived just in time and you are spared my efforts!
Please think about your contributions for next year and let me have them in good time so that I can transfer them to my computer.
I apologize for the late issue but we are having problems duplicating the printed version. If you are not on e-mail you might have to wait a little.

Ken Key

FLOODLIGHTING

We have suspended floodlighting for the summer but you can still sponsor in September for £5 per week.

Paddy Beynon

CHURCH STEWARDING

Fr. Mark and I are grateful to all those who steward St Mary's church on Wednesday afternoons.
For some time I have been able to fill an A4 page with the rota but several people have recently dropped out. Stewards give a welcome to visitors to the church and will meet all sorts of interesting people and also gain knowledge of this magnificent building and its history and treasures.
If you can spend a couple of hours two or three times a year, please let me know and I will find a place for you on the rota.

Ken Key.