

Abergavenny Local History Society

FLASHBACK

The 2020 Summer Newsletter



Introduction

Early in 2020 the ALHS Committee decided, with Ken Key's approval, that there should be no more Summer Newsletters. Ken (who has recently celebrated his 95th birthday) edited, printed and distributed *all* the previous Newsletters. However the events of this year have made us feel that, with lectures and visits postponed, many of the members would appreciate the reappearance of the newsletter, even if the content was not entirely new.

So we have put together a selection of articles from past Newsletters ranging from the very first one, which was three pages long and is included complete, through a selection of articles from the eighties, nineties, noughties and teens. We have added one recent article at the end that you may not have found online earlier in the year.

We hope you will enjoy our selection. There is an emphasis on the first few years of newsletters and this will give you an insight into the foundations of many of the Society's activities - and of their range. The Lectures and Visits have only ever been a part, though a very significant part, of the Society's activities. With your support and involvement we're trusting that the Society shall continue to thrive for the foreseeable future.

Contents

1.	Summer Newsletter No 1 <i>including Street Survey, Plaques, Visits, Award</i>	1986	p 1
2.	Eisteddfoddau <i>Anon</i>	1987	p 4
3.	Demolishing the Volunteer's Hall <i>Arthur Fleet</i>	1988	p 5
4.	St Mary's Priory Study Group <i>Anon</i>	1989	p 5
	The Close Rolls <i>Anon</i>		p 5
	The Anglo Saxon Chronicles <i>Anon</i>		p 6
	Computerisation of Members' List <i>Anon</i>		p 6
5.	Drawing Sherds <i>Ken Key</i>	1991	p 7
6.	Summer Visits 1994 <i>Alan Spink</i>	1995	p 8
7.	The "Drake Connection" <i>TJ Coope</i>	1997	p 9
	Tretower Trails <i>Gwynne Jones</i>		p 10
	Cider Making in Gwent <i>Frank Olding</i>		p 12
8.	The Abergavenny Story (DVD) <i>Anon</i>	2008	p 14
9.	In Flanders Fields 2011 <i>Various</i>	2012	p 15
10.	Recusancy in Monmouthshire <i>David Powell</i>	2016	p 19
11.	Abergavenny and World War II <i>Gill Wakley</i>	2020	p 22

Ken Key's pick

Ken Key's pick

Summer Newsletter No. 1, 1985

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

Over one hundred members regularly attend winter lectures in the Angel Hotel ballroom. Although waiting lists occur for our popular summer visits only a few people are, in the end, disappointed.

We welcome new members and a special invitation is extended to those who, for a variety of reasons, have 'got out of the habit' of attending our functions.

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

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

Abergavenny Street Survey – 1979-1984.

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

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

We spent many hours with trade directories going back to 1822, also looking at some deeds which are most interesting; there is yet more to be found in the record office in Cwmbran by anyone who has the time and interest. We keep working copies in the Museum and they can be added to at any time, so if you have any snippets of information, or old photographs, they would be most welcome. The photo copy of the complete project has been bound by the Archivist, and is house in Abergavenny Library for all to see. We hope it will stimulate interest in the town so that no more valuable buildings will suffer wanton destruction.

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

Plaques.

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

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

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

One more plaque, to mark the site of the former Bull Inn, has been produced and will be put up in due course.

Summer Visits.

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

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

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

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

Floodlighting.

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

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

British Association for Local History Award.

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

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

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

Photographic Competition.

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

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

Winter Lecture Programme 1985/86.

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

Officers.

Chairman Mr Gwyn Jones
Treasurer Mrs Freda Key
Secretary Mr Alan Spink

Summer Newsletter No 3, 1987

EISTEDDFODAU

When Mr R.H. Jackson of 11 Priory Road Abergavenny sent out preliminary programmes for the Abergavenny Eisteddfod on Easter Monday 1910 he desired, he said, “to direct your earnest attention to the contents which would remain true to the standards of progressive thought and efficiency”.

He assured the competitors in a host of classes, ranging from choral singing to photography, from instrumental solos to essays, of fair conditions, most expert adjudicators and, best of all, £300 in prizes – no mean sum in 1910.

The main prize in the 20th eisteddfod in 1853 amounted to £70 donated by some of the local gentry. Lady Hall of Llanover, Sir John Guest, Colonel Kemys Tynte all stumped up their five or ten guineas. Even one Adam Gordon of Knockespoth and His Excellency the Chevalier Bunsen were prevailed upon to give a few guineas. It was the latter gentleman who proposed the formidable subject of the competition, “for the best essay on the origin and progress of trial by jury in Wales to be written in Welsh, French or English”.

Anyone capable dashing off an essay on “the best analysis of the Remains of the Welsh poets, to contain as much Bardic biography as possible” stood a chance of winning £30. An English prose translation of “The Gododin”, not forgetting the explanatory notes, brought the lucky winner twelve guineas.

If your talents were better suited to a Welsh ode on the destruction of the Druids of Mona in A.D. 60 by the Roman army or an elegy in Welsh on Taliesin, you not only received a few pounds in prize money, but also a medal of one pound (in weight?) from Lady Hall of Llanover.

For singers and harpists the prizes were numerous, although not so valuable as for the dauntingly intellectual subjects. Blind harpists were not left out, nor penillion singers “after the manner of North Wales”.

If one could neither sing nor play, skill in spinning and weaving could win £3 donated by Viscountess Nevill “for the best specimen of Welsh dyed Blue Cloth, five yards long”, although the class for Welsh dyed scarlet cloth carried a prize of £10.

Welsh Rodnay Woollen and Welsh Woollen Whittle were also featured – does anyone now remember what they were?

Manufacturing a Welsh Hat, knitting gloves and stockings of Welsh black sheep’s wool all stood to win prizes. There was even a special judge of Welsh hats – one Mr Thompson of Abergavenny.

The judge of “the Great Prize” was none other than His Excellency Chevalier Bunsen, he of the trial by jury dissertation. The professor of the harp at the Royal Academy lent his august presence to judge the music.

One hopes that 60 years later, Mr Jackson was able to secure equally ‘expert adjudicators’ for his eisteddfod!

[Ed 2020: if you wish to follow up this article with some research of your own into Welsh woollen fabrics then this website is a good place to start -

<https://welshhat.wordpress.com/manufacture/manufacturers/gwenffrwd-mill/>

Summer Newsletter No 4, 1988

DEMOLISHING THE VOLUNTEERS' HALL

This account of the demolition, in the 1950s of the Drill Hall, or Volunteers' Hall, which stood in Tudor Street opposite the King's Arms, was given to me by Mr Reg Allison, formerly foreman of the Borough Council.

The building was strongly built with walls about two feet thick, and it was decided it could best be dealt with by blowing it up.

Mr Allison went to Brynmawr for the gelignite and on his return found everything had been prepared. The police had cleared the area, roads were roped off and everyone was waiting for the big bang. The charges were quickly placed, and on being fired many bricks were thrown about, some falling in Nevill Street.

A large hole in the shape of an arch was blown in the building, which was then very unstable. Examination showed that the removal of one stone would complete the work and, on this being levered out, the remainder of the building came crashing down and covered everyone there in dust. However, the demolition was safely accomplished and all that remained was for the men to dust themselves down and to clean up the mess.

Arthur Fleet.

Summer Newsletter No 5, 1989

St MARY'S PRIORY STUDY GROUP

Some of our members have been reading through the items in a rapidly expanding bibliography under the chairmanship of Malcolm Wills-Wood. The loss of Freda, our information retrieval expert, was a bitter blow but work is continuing. In the vast amount of literature there is surprisingly little about the priory although many other fascinating things have been revealed.

THE CLOSE ROLLS

In our research we have been interested to see how centralised was the government in early mediaeval times. The king would receive messages as he travelled about the country and would answer them on the spot by writing a letter, rolling it up and sealing it as a 'Close Roll'. He had no duplicator and he expected the recipient would do his bidding and send the roll back to him.

Unfortunately, many recipients felt the king should go and boil his head and tore up the rolls so that important public records are lost. The king did not delegate and attended to things which nowadays a junior civil servant would handle. On September 18 1334 Edward III wrote "John de Malmesbury, parson of Lanwaynarth church, diocese of Llandaff acknowledges that he owes to Nicholas de Stratton, citizen and rope-maker of London, 200 marks; to be levied, in default of payment, of his lands and chattels and ecclesiastical goods."

THE ANGLO SAXON CHRONICLE

(from St Mary's Study Group)

King Alfred in the first flower of his youth was desirous that his heart stand firm in God's ordinances, but yet he perceived that he was not free from the lusts of the flesh, so ----- he prayed that almighty God would in his mercy strengthen his mind in the love of his service by means of some infirmity which he might be able to bear, --- but that he might not thereby be rendered unworthy and unfit for his worldly duties. He entreated this very often with great earnestness, and in a short time afterwards he was, by God's permission, afflicted with the piles.

COMPUTERISATION OF MEMBERS' LIST

It is proposed to make a list on disc of members' names, addresses and telephone numbers which are at present held on a cumbersome card file. However, before we can do this we must comply with the requirements of the Data Protection Act. We are an "Unincorporated Members' Club" and are exempt from the whole of the act and the hefty registration fee provided we comply with two conditions.

Firstly we must ask all members through this newsletter whether they object to their data being on computer file and we must also ask all new members if they object before they join. If anyone does object then this negates the whole point of the exercise, namely to make the administration of the Society easier for its officers.

Secondly we must not disclose your data to anyone without your permission.

You will appreciate that the treasurer will have the list at the table to deal with subscriptions at the meeting and there would be little to stop people looking over her shoulder but we would not let anyone other than officers of the society or its sub committees or group organisers have access to the list of members.

This is what we would put on file about you

Your name, address and telephone number.

The name and address of the person, for example wife or husband, with whom you would share a single copy of a publication, for example, this newsletter.

The date you paid your subscription.

The visits you have booked and the amount you paid to go on these visits.

The area code so that we can print newsletter labels in batches for delivery by hand.

A code indicating membership of committees, sub-committees and groups such as those for St Mary's Research or Stewarding so that we can distribute minutes and rotas etc.

The dates on which you have booked floodlighting and what you have paid.

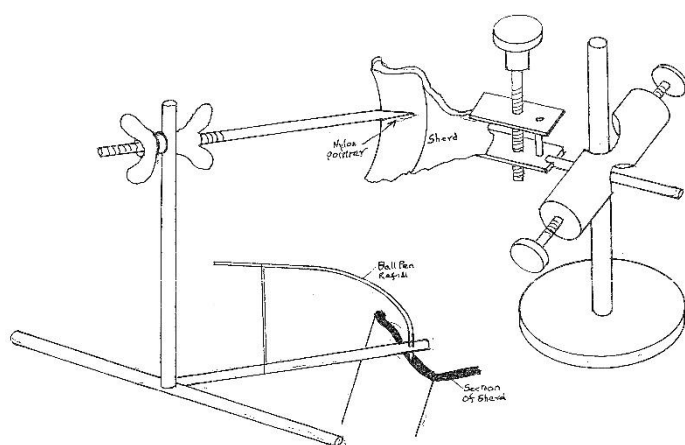
The transfer of the list to the computer is mean task and we give notice that if no one objects we would start at the beginning of August to be ready for the first meeting in September.

Summer Newsletter No 7, 1991

DRAWING SHERDS

As one who failed Matriculation Art (they gave me a gas mask to draw!) I found great difficulty in recording the many sherds from the excavation in Castle Street in 1971. The usual method was to press wire or cored solder around the pot and use this to draw the outline. There were some clever lines of pins which could be pressed into the contour of the pot but all these methods were inconsistent in result and thus none too accurate.

The method which I devised involved a framework of rods which held a pointer vertically above a ball point pen refill and is shown in the diagram below. In order to set the pointer, a thin sheet of tin was held vertically in the clamp and the wing nuts were adjusted until the sheet could be drawn with its correct thickness by pointing at right angles to it on each side. The pointer was then carefully



bent sideways until the sheet could be drawn with its correct thickness with the pointer on each side and as nearly in line with the sheet as possible.

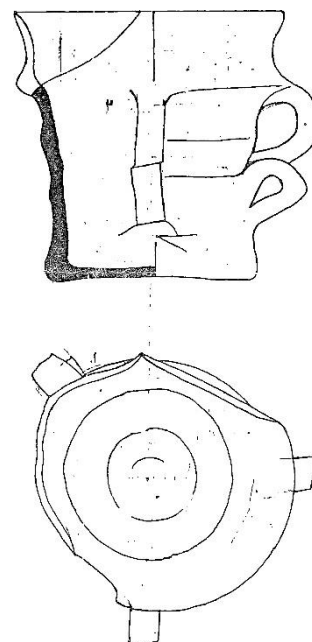
The sherd was then placed in the clamp with its rim vertical and its centre on a level with the pointer, which was preferably made of nylon so as not to damage the sherd as it was traced around it.

It was possible to estimate the rim diameter by matching it with concentric arcs of circles and if the base was also available, this could be used as a check. If the pot had been turned and not too distorted in the firing, a fair drawing could result.

A great many fragments of brown pub mugs were found on the Castle Street site. There was a pub in Lower Castle Street and another further down Castle Street. Perhaps one of the "Completely Lost Pubs of Abergavenny" was on the site itself – who knows?

These mugs are not remarkable but shown on the previous page and drawn using this apparatus is a most interesting six handles 17th century tyg found in Flannel Street which is on display in the museum.

There were, of course, a vast number of pubs in the vicinity of Flannel Street and I am assured that the tyg was not, in the language of the archaeologist who hasn't a clue, "ritual" but was in fact an "imbibing vessel". Why six handles?



Ken Key

Summer Newsletter No 11, 1995

SUMMER VISITS 1994

Certainly the grandest house we visited last year was Buckingham Palace. The beautiful rooms were designed mainly by John Nash, the same John Nash who much earlier in his career designed a new market for Abergavenny. Each room was filled with old masters and antique furniture all in top quality condition and beautifully displayed. It was a memorable visit.

Our first visit however was to Powis Castle, the mediaeval stronghold of the Welsh princes of upper Powis and the home of the Herbert family since 1587. Its connection with Clive of India was demonstrated by the objects brought back with him from India and put on display in the museum. Unfortunately the weather was not too kind to us and prevented much more than a cursory visit to the famous terraced gardens.

Sulgrave Manor, the English home of the ancestors of George Washington was our first stop on the three day visit. The house which was completed in 1558 was lived in by the descendants of the Washington family for over 120 years.

After lunch Arthur Peplow guided us around two world famous Saxon churches at Brixworth and Earls Barton to complete the first day.

Next morning our first stop was Fotheringhay where after visiting the church we went to the site of the castle where in 1587 Mary Queen of Scots was executed. The castle was the birthplace of the future King Richard III.

A tour of Ely Cathedral and its environs concluded the second day.

On our way home we stopped to look at one of the first surviving Eleanor Crosses at Beddington. These crosses were erected by King Edward I to mark each of the places where his wife's coffin rested overnight on its way back to London for burial after her death at Harby in Nottinghamshire in 1290.

Canons Ashby House was the final place we visited. Built in the 16th century it is the home of the Dryden family.

The first of our two evening visits was to Mannington Court near Hereford situated in a magnificent setting near a lake and its own Norman church. The house is owned by one of the Bulmer family. Parts of it date from 1230 and it is being carefully restored and filled with authentic period furniture.

On our second evening visit our chairman Mr Gwyn Jones acted as our guide at Skenfrith. He took us around the castle with its large circular keep within the castle walls, also the small church nearby.

Bristol was our final destination to look at the S.S. Great Britain. Built in 1843 and designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel she was the first propeller driven iron ship in history. In the afternoon we boarded a boat for a tour of the docks to learn something of its history, and stopped at a riverside café for tea before returning home.

Alan Spink

Summer Newsletter No 13, 1997

THE "DRAKE CONNECTION"

Everyone is familiar with the story of Sir Francis Drake who insisted on finishing his game of bowls before taking on the Spanish Armada, but, I wonder how many people realise that in Abergavenny we have the oldest bowling club in South Wales – if not the whole country. *Abergavenny Bowling Club*, or *The Little Skirrid Club* as it was known locally, began in the year 1860. The green was at the rear of the Great Western Hotel. It was founded by local traders and businessmen with the assistance and goodwill of the hotel landlord, and on Thursday afternoons it was custom for members first to enjoy a friendly game and then to adjourn to the hotel to eat, drink and make merry.

There were few organised competitive matches in those days, but when a game was played, the club was known as The Abergavenny Bowling Club – the name it bears today.

In 1910 the Marquis of Abergavenny made land available for the extension and improvement of the Cricket Club and was prevailed upon to make additional ground available for a new bowling green. This was to benefit those people who wished to take part in sport but did not wish to play either cricket or tennis plus, of course, those already converted to the art of bowling. When the new green was completed the one at the rear of the Great Western Hotel was closed, and the club officially moved to Avenue Road and was reconstituted as The Abergavenny Bowling Club.

After two world wars and the ups and downs that all clubs undergo, the bowling club still continues and now shares its facilities with The Nevill Ladies Bowls Club.

Over the years Abergavenny Bowling Club has produced many fine bowlers who have represented both County and Country, besides providing healthy exercise for hundreds of others.

How nice it would be, if in the year 2060, a member of Abergavenny Local History Society was to turn to the back page of the Chronicle and see that Abergavenny Bowling Club had played a match on the previous weekend – and won handsomely!

This could, of course, only happen if both clubs are supported in the intervening years.

So! Anyone interested in keeping history alive and bowls rolling should amble along to the green in Avenue Road. It is a beautiful setting and well worth a visit.

T.J. Coope.

FLOODLIGHTING

Floodlight the castle for £4 per week

**Kathleen Spink will be taking orders
for 1998 after the September meeting**

**You can book an individual week or
you can book the same week every
year for an anniversary**



TRETOWER TRAVELS

Our journey to this year's summer party to Tretower Court and Gliffaes takes us along the A40 towards Brecon – one of the most picturesque journeys in an area of outstanding beauty.

An added pleasure is the number of sites of interest along that route. In the hills and narrow valleys, especially to the north of Abergavenny, modern roads usually follow ancient pathways so that close by we find evidence of man's occupation from Neolithic times through Iron Age to the Roman and Norman periods.

The following list of some of those sites and simple map might encourage you to take a closer look when you are in the area.

The O/S Abergavenny and Black Mountains map, sheet 161, provides clearer detail than I have provided and leads you beyond my map to the delights of Bwlch and Talybont etc.

1. Llanwenarth Church

Take a left turn at the garage soon after passing Nevill Hall Hospital along what may well have been the line of the earliest main road to the West and led also to the River Usk ferry crossing. It is claimed that a church had existed on this site since 600 A.D. and that the font is pre-Norman; the present building dates back from 1631.

The church is normally closed outside service time but a key may be obtained from Church Cottage nearby.

2. The Usk Ferry Crossing

Near a stile on the bed of the river just to the north of the church, a notice points you to the ferry, 0.4 km. A short path leads you to the river bank where, until recently, a post, part of the rope ferry gear, still stood. The ferry closed as recently as 1951; the landing ramp on the far side is still visible.

3. Glangrwyne

Park your car in The Bell car park if you are a customer, or on the main road if you don't like pleasant hostilities. Cross the busy main road with care and take the signposted tarmac public footpath, keeping the cricket pitch on your left. It is a most pleasant walk to Llangenny and, further on, to Llanbedr.

4. Cwrt y gollen standing stone

This Bronze Age stone is set back amongst trees on the left of the main entrance to the army camp. There are a number of these standing stones, probably route or territory markers, in the area but this by far the most impressive.

It is not over cautious to suggest an approach from the Crickhowell direction and parking alongside the small army museum building well away from speeding cars reacting to the calming restrictions at Crickhowell and Glangrwyne

5. Crickhowell Castle

Take the last left turning before you enter Crickhowell from the south and park alongside the Danycastell Presbyterian church; the gateway approach takes you to the castle.

Built first as a motte and bailey castle in the 12th century by the Turbervilles, the later stone castle was reported to have been left in ruins by Owen Glyndŵr and became totally uninhabitable by the mid 16th century. On the tower alongside the boundary of the proudly restored cricket ground is an excellent reconstruction plaque of the castle in its prime. Take the trouble to climb the castle mound; from it you can gain a superb view of the delightful town and of the original settlement, the Crug Hywel Iron Age camp, high above the town to the north east, from which the town takes its name.

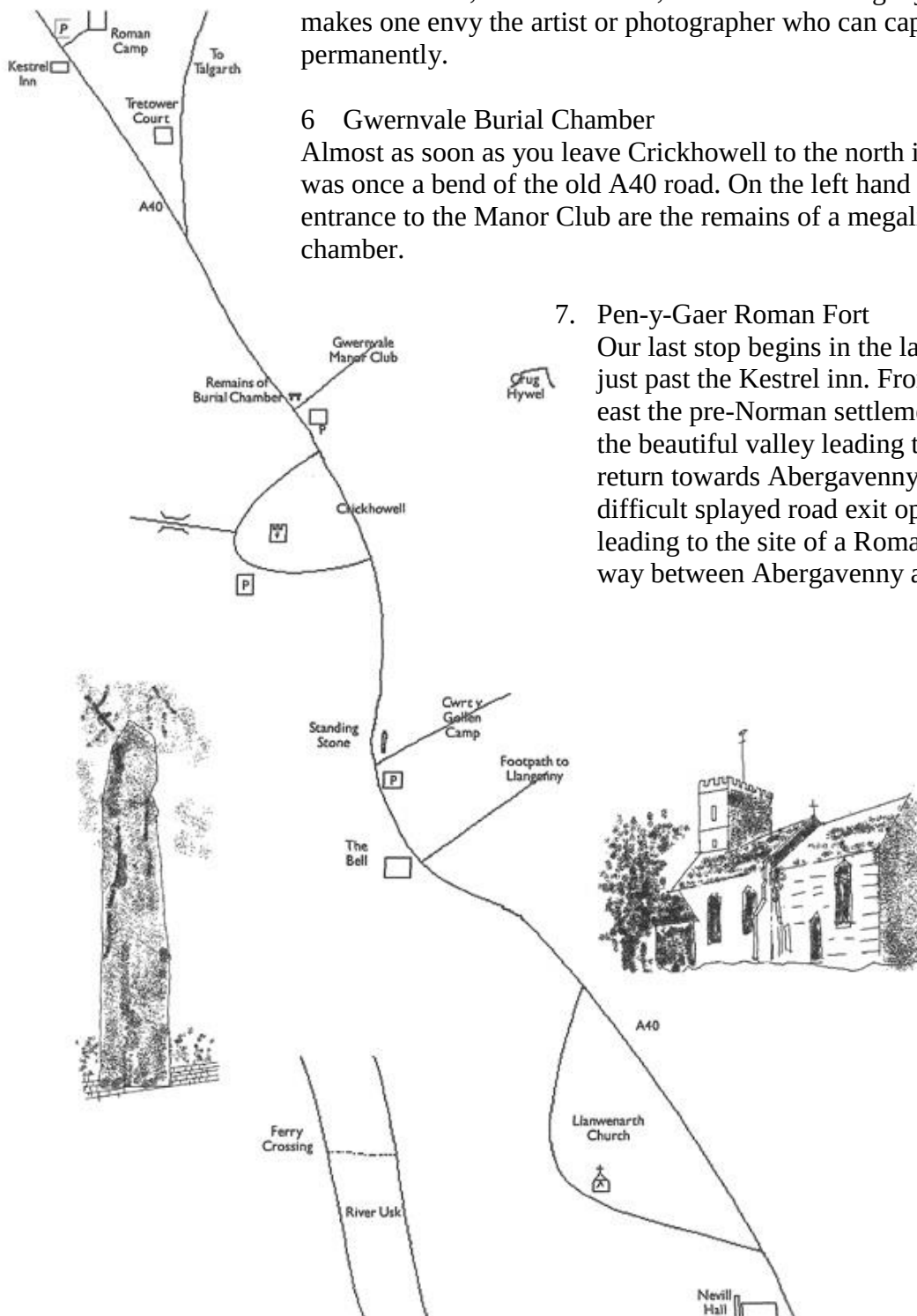
Afterwards take the car on and to the right and park in the busy shopping area of Crickhowell. From outside Lloyds Bank look north; the view of the market hall, memorial cross, The Bear and Crug Hywel beyond makes one envy the artist or photographer who can capture the scene permanently.

6 Gwernvale Burial Chamber

Almost as soon as you leave Crickhowell to the north is a lay-by which was once a bend of the old A40 road. On the left hand side of the entrance to the Manor Club are the remains of a megalithic burial chamber.

7. Pen-y-Gaer Roman Fort

Our last stop begins in the lay-by on the right just past the Kestrel inn. From it view to the east the pre-Norman settlement of Cwmdy in the beautiful valley leading to Talgarth. Now return towards Abergavenny and turn left at a difficult splayed road exit opposite the inn leading to the site of a Roman Camp about half way between Abergavenny and Brecon.



It is worth carrying the O/S map of this area and perhaps follow the Roman Road pattern.

Gwyn Jones

CIDER MAKING IN GWENT

Cider making is first recorded in Herefordshire in the 14th century and it is likely that it spread to the neighbouring areas at about the same time. The earliest use of the Welsh word seidr is also dated to the 14th century.

By the 16th and 17th centuries cider making was well established in Monmouthshire. In 1679 the probate inventory of the worldly goods of Joseph Hayles of Abergavenny includes a cider press and cider stored in his cellar.

In the 18th century there was a thriving trade exporting cider from Chepstow to Bristol. In 1786 the poet Edward Davies wrote:

‘No better cider can the world supply
Than grows along thy borders, gentle Wye;
Delicious, strong, and exquisitely fine,
With all the friendly properties of wine.’

By 1813 it could be reported that

‘There are orchards in all the vale parts of the county, and some farmers make more cider in plentiful years than their forefathers consume.’

By 1878 some 3,954 acres were given over to cider orchards in the county as a whole. Even in the hill districts where cider apples could not be grown, farmers made cider with apples brought in from their lowland neighbours. Cider drinking extended over an even wider area which stretched as far as Brecon, Rhaeadr and Montgomeryshire.

Having said all this, cider making in Gwent was almost entirely a domestic affair. Farmers produced just enough for their own needs through the year, and what trade there was took place with neighbouring farms or local public houses.

Farmhouse cider was very dry, completely still and very thirst-quenching – exactly what was required by people involved in hard physical labour! It was safer to drink than unreliable water in a period when outbreaks of cholera and typhoid were still common. It was also stronger than most beer of its day!

CIDER APPLES

The cider apples grown in Gwent included two local varieties known as ‘Perthyr’ (after the hamlet of Perth-hir) and ‘Monmouthshire Greens’. Other popular varieties included the ‘Redstreak’, ‘Kingston Black’, ‘Sheep Snout’ and ‘Foxwhelp’. One variety, the ‘White Norman’, was notoriously difficult to harvest and so earned the popular nickname of ‘the Bastard Norman’.

The apples begin to fall in September, and those that had not fallen were shaken off the tree using an apple hook or ‘panking pole’. They were then collected into heaps and left in the corner of the orchard until they were ready for crushing – when they were soft enough for the thumb to be pushed into them.

MILLING

Several methods were employed to crush the apples. By far the most common method was the stone cider mill. A circular structure some seven feet in diameter, the base supported a circular stone trough or ‘chase’. An upright ‘runner’ – similar to a large millstone and weighing up to seven hundredweight – was attached to a central pivot and powered by a horse, the earliest example in

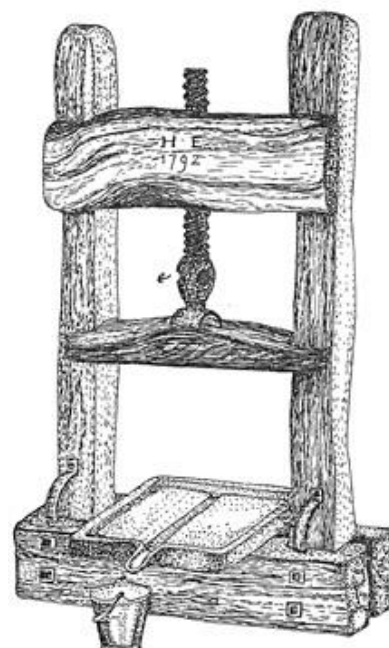
Wales is dated 1770 and comes from Craig-y-Bwla farm near Crickhowell. Another excellent example survives at Pant y Goetre farm near Llanfair Cilgedin.

Cider millstones or runners were usually made from a coarse quartz conglomerate of Old Red Sandstone obtained either from the Bloreng or from the Penallt Quarries in the Wye valley.

PRESSING

The next stage in the cider-making process was pressing – squeezing the pomace to extract the juice. At one time heavy oak cider presses were employed for this purpose, but during the 19th century these were gradually replaced by lighter presses with iron fittings.

Because pomace is runny it has to be held in place to be pressed. In the west of England this was done by mixing it with alternate layers of straw. In Gwent, farmers preferred to use ‘hairs’ – large coarse mats made from horse hair – which held the pomace in position whilst allowing the juice to run out. The hair was placed on the base of the press and pomace spread evenly over it. The sides of the hair were then folded over the top to form an envelope and the next hair placed on top. Several hairs were built up in this way to form a ‘cheese’. A flat board or ‘shooter’ was placed on top and the press beam was slowly screwed down.



The apple juice was collected in a shallow tub or trough known as a ‘cooler’ placed at the base of the press. It was then transferred to casks to ferment. Second hand rum casks were particularly prized because of the flavour imparted to the cider.

FERMENTATION

Fermentation began after two or three days and impurities were expelled in the form of a brown scum which gathered around the bung hole. When this turned white and the cider stopped bubbling, fermentation was almost complete. Once fermentation ended, the bung hole was sealed to make it airtight – in some parts of Gwent this was done with a mixture of chaff, clay and cow-dung! The cider was ready for drinking after about three months and could be stored for up to five years.

CIDER DRINKING

Cider was the staple drink of the agricultural population of Gwent and was given as part payment for labouring in the fields. Farmers who produced poor cider often had difficulty in attracting anyone to work for them!

The usual daily allowance for a farm worker in Wales seems to have been between two and four quarts a day. Labourers carried their cider to the fields in costrels which held about half a gallon. These were filled in the morning and then refilled after lunch. Sometimes each person had his own horn cup, but at harvest one cup would be passed from person to person ‘with the sun’ (i.e. in a clockwise fashion).

Drunkenness and fights were not uncommon and the harvest sometimes had to be suspended to ensure the safety of all concerned!

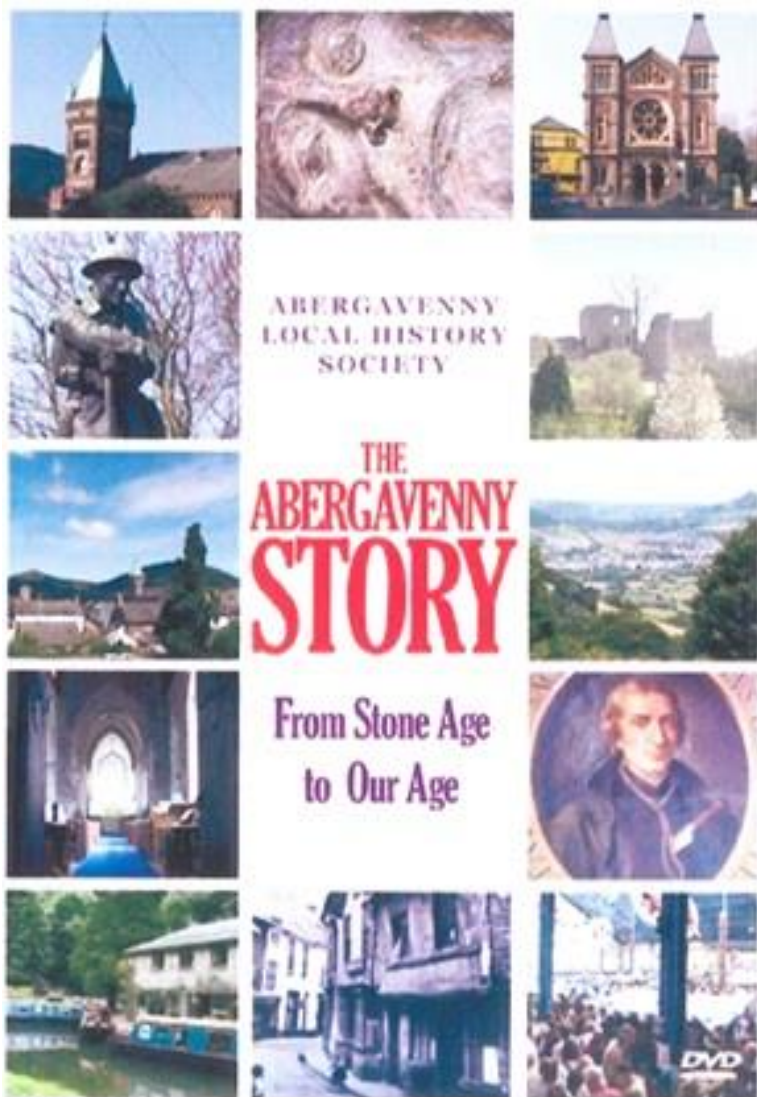
It was usual to offer a glass of cider to any visitor who called at the farm – some farmers kept barrels of particularly sour cider for tramps or other unwelcome guests!

Frank Olding

Summer Newsletter No 24, 2008

THE ABERGAVENNY STORY: FROM STONE AGE TO OUR AGE

This DVD has been a long time in gestation but it is now ready for publication. It is being shown in the Museum on a loop system in the room awaiting display cases – so, if you want a preview, seize the moment! It will be on sale later, complete with a map of places mentioned.



It has been well received by people who have seen it at the Abergavenny Museum and there have already been a number of inquirers wanting to buy it.

It has been made by Paul Keenan of PK Productions Ltd who started the project in his spare time while working for an Ebbw Vale film company after we received a £750 grant from Monmouthshire County Council.

The script has been written by a team of nine who each contributed a section and the main script editor was our former Chairman, Richard Davies. Thanks must go to Frank Olding for providing the information on pre-historic and Roman Abergavenny.

The main voice-over has been recorded by Gary Meredith and you may recognise Richard's voice as the other narrator.

Thanks too must go to a number of other people such as Sally Davis, of Abergavenny Museum who provided a number of drawings, the young harpist Eleanor Cotterill, Frances Baines and Michael Blackmore for allowing their work to be used; the video-maker who sent in a clip of a 1970s Abergavenny Carnival, and to the re-enactment companies.

We shall be rolling out the red carpet soon for the film premiere and hope to invite everyone who has helped in any way. The recommended retail price of the film will be £10 and it will be available direct from the Society at a discount.

Summer Newsletter No 28, 2012

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.

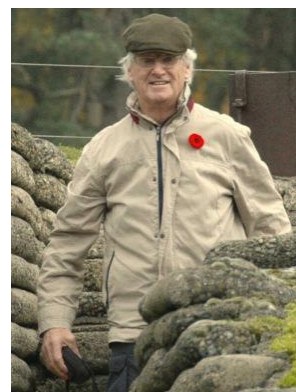
Bryn Seabourne

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.

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 Olympic Torch was carried through Abergavenny in May 2012



Summer Newsletter No 32, 2016

RECUSANCY IN MONMOUTHSHIRE

The Abergavenny Chronicle of May 5th 2016 headlined a campaign to save the town's Gunter Mansion. One of the main features of its historic importance lies in the fact that it was home to a secret Catholic chapel in which the Mass was celebrated, at a time when to do so was a crime. The Welsh Georgian Trust aims to raise enough money to buy the house, carry out repairs and ultimately to allow the chapel to be opened alongside a small centre celebrating the history of Catholicism in Wales.



ADORATION OF THE MAGI
REREDOS FROM THE GUNTER CHAPEL FOUND IN 1960,5 ON A CHAIR IN THE SHOP
AND MOVED TO THE MUSEUM BY THE LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY
Picture HDC Museums Service

The chapel was an active centre of Catholic worship during what are often referred to as "penal times", when Catholics, clergy and laity, faced penalties of varying severity for daring to pursue "yr Hen Fydd"-the "Old Faith". This period stretched from Henry VIII's Reformation well into the 18th Century, persecution being at its peak during the reign of Elizabeth and surging again at times in the 17th century, notably at the time of the Popish Plot of the 1670s. Those who refused to forsake Catholicism and observe the practices of the Church of England were known as 'recusants' deriving from the Latin *recusare* to refuse.

Henry had declared himself Supreme Head of the Church in England and Wales, replacing the Pope. In Wales, as in England, one of the main aspects of the change was the dissolution of the monasteries. Tintern Abbey was probably Monmouthshire's main casualty. In Abergavenny the Benedictine priory was dissolved, although it was not until 1543, somewhat later than most. St Mary's became the parish church, replacing St John's which in turn became the first site of King Henry VIII Grammar School.

Sweeping religious change came in the reign of Henry's successor Edward VI, including the imposition of the English Book of Common Prayer in 1549. This was incomprehensible to most Welsh people. At least the old Latin had been familiar! Edward died in 1553 and the next 5 years were a case of 'into reverse' as Mary tried to restore England and Wales to allegiance to Rome. This period saw the replacing of Anglican clergy with Catholic and the persecution of those regarded as heretics, with the ultimate penalty of burning at the stake.

Mary's death in 1558 ushered in the reign of Elizabeth. Her concern was to achieve some form of religious stability after the upheavals of the previous 20 years. In 1559 an Act of Supremacy once more rejected Papal authority restoring the Tudor monarch as Supreme Governor of the Church in England and Wales. A modified Book of Common Prayer was restored and Marian clergy who refused to take the prescribed oath were ousted. Only one of the four Welsh bishops- Kitchen of Llandaff conformed.

The degree to which penal laws against those refusing to conform were enforced depended essentially on the will and inclination of local magistrates and the Queen herself was anxious not to "seek a window into men's souls". It was hoped that as the old priesthood died out those more compliant with the new order would prevail. However a number of factors led to a hardening of attitude. The Catholic Church condemned any support for Anglican services and the formal excommunication of Elizabeth by Pope Pius V meant that in theory any of her Catholic subjects

was free to be disloyal. Added to this in the 1570s and 80s there was an increasing flow of fervent newly ordained missionary priests from abroad, particularly those of the newly formed Jesuit order. The aim of these was to restore England and Wales to Catholicism and to provide spiritual support for recusants. In Elizabeth's reign some 54 men of Welsh origin were ordained to the Catholic priesthood although most were to serve outside Wales.

The missionary priests relied on the willingness of Catholic families, particularly gentry and nobility to give them support and shelter. In Monmouthshire the Morgans of Llantarnam and the Gunter and Pritchards of Abergavenny were prominent. Amongst the nobility, Edward Somerset of Raglan befriended recusants and Catholic priests and writers. There were some however



THIS BACK VIEW OF THE GUNTER HOUSE WAS ORIGINALLY THE FRONT.

who favoured more direct action such as Thomas Morgan of Monmouthshire who was actively involved in a series of plots to replace Elizabeth with Mary Queen of Scots. He actually set up the fateful meeting between Mary and Anthony Babington, whose eponymous plot eventually led to Mary's execution in 1587. The unsuccessful attempt of the Spanish Armada to restore Catholicism by force in the following year meant even stricter enforcement of penal laws against recusants.

The Somerset family of Raglan, in the persons of the third and fourth Earls of Worcester had bent to the prevailing Protestant wind in the 16th century but had retained Catholic sympathies. By the time of the succession of the fifth Earl in 1628 however there had been family reconversion to Catholicism thanks to the efforts of Father Robert Jones, a Welsh Jesuit and Raglan castle was in Catholic hands. The fifth Earl and his sister Frances Morgan of Llantarnam helped establish a Jesuit College at the Cwm in Llanrothal, on the Monmouthshire/Herefordshire border, which survived until 1678, housing 20 priests at its peak, and being very successful in reversing the decline in Catholic fortunes. It is thought that in the middle of the 17th century that Catholics accounted for up to 20% of the population of Monmouthshire. At Abergavenny it was reckoned that more people attended the Mass celebrated in the aforementioned Gunter house than those attending the parish church! Pilgrimages continued to the ruined chapel of St Michael on Skirrid Fawr, much to the chagrin of local Protestant gentry such as John Arnold of Llanvihangel Court.

We thus have a flavour of the survival of Catholicism in Monmouthshire. Recusancy, however, came at a price in the form of fines, often ruinous. Amongst the gentry for example the staunchly Catholic Edward Morgan of Llantarnam paid £7,760 between 1580 and 1633, an enormous sum in those days.

So until the mid- 17th century Catholicism persisted strongly in what was generally a tolerant atmosphere. Priests went about fairly openly and the Jesuits of the Cwm were regularly seen obtaining their provisions at Monmouth market. In the 1670s the tide turned against Catholics in Monmouthshire. Raglan was lost as a Catholic centre when the Worcesters returned to Anglicanism. A growing number of Protestant gentry professed alarm at the growing strength of 'popery' and presented the House of Commons with a detailed account of Catholic activity in Monmouthshire and Herefordshire. Prominent amongst these gentry were John Scudamore of Kentchurch and the aforementioned John Arnold.

Their efforts were compounded by the lurid allegations of the Popish Plot of 1678 in which one, Titus Oates claimed to have uncovered a plot to murder Charles II and replace him with his brother the Catholic Duke of York, James. This fabrication was sufficient to create a tide of anti-Catholic

feeling and persecution, which affected Monmouthshire considerably. Attention had been drawn to the Cwm and its Superior, Fr. David Lewis evacuated it and the community scattered. In December 1678 the college was suppressed by the Bishop of Hereford and its premises raided and ransacked. David Lewis had already been arrested and incarcerated in Monmouth gaol.

David Lewis was an Abergavenny man and had lived for many years at Llantarnam Abbey with the Morgan family. He ministered at Usk and said Mass regularly at the Gunter house, as did another priest, Fr Philip Evans who had been born at Llangattock Vibon Abel. Both preached eloquently in Welsh and English. David Lewis was the son of Morgan Lewis, sometime principal of the Grammar School. Although not baptised a Catholic he had converted on a visit to the continent and was ordained a Jesuit priest in the 1640s, returning to the English/Welsh mission in 1648. Until the 1670s, as indicated, the Jesuit missions seems to have led a fairly untroubled existence and he was on friendly terms with gentry families -even possibly with Arnold at one stage! He had a reputation as a committed and compassionate pastor, being known locally as 'the father of the poor'. Now he was swept up in the fury of the Popish Plot.

Tried and condemned to death at the Monmouth Assizes in June 1679, he was then taken to London for questioning, where he refused offers of life and wealth in return for 'revelations'.

His execution took place at Usk in August 1679. Such was his local reputation that he was spared the official penalty of hanging drawing and quartering and allowed to die by hanging alone. Philip Evans suffered the full penalty at Cardiff Castle.

The plot left its scars on the Catholic community of Monmouthshire. The Jesuit mission was finished and Catholics deprived of their priests. Many, frightened of the severity of the persecution conformed to the established Church and the Catholic population declined sufficiently. Nevertheless the Catholic tradition of the county did not die. In 1687 a Franciscan mission was established at Abergavenny in Frogmore St., in the area between Nevill Street and Lewis Lane. The house had been bought by Thomas Gunter and when he died his wife gave it to the Franciscans for a chapel. By 1740, possibly the lowest ebb of Welsh Catholicism in post-Reformation Wales, half the Catholics in Monmouthshire were located in Abergavenny and the Franciscans found it necessary to build a new church and add a gallery to accommodate numbers attending Mass. This remained the centre of Catholic worship and the Franciscans continued until 1858 when the present Catholic church at Pen-y- Pound was founded and the Benedictines took over. The building of the old church -and its gallery - survive as the home of the Dover printing works



In the 18th century the Papacy divided England and Wales into four districts, each under the jurisdiction of a Vicar General. Monmouthshire lay in the Western District and its Vicar General, one Bishop Matthew Pritchard, a Franciscan, resided at Perthir, home of the recusant Lorymer and Powell families, near Monmouth. He died in 1750 and is buried in Rockfield church.

The end of the 18th century saw the beginning of the relaxation of the penal laws against recusancy and in 1793 the first public place of Catholic worship, post-reformation was permitted in Monmouth and the first part of St Mary's Catholic church built. The Industrial Revolution, and in

particular its attendant influx of Irish immigrants heralded anew age for Catholicism. In Monmouthshire, however, Catholic worship had never died out and the recusant story is an important part of its history and heritage. The ambition to preserve the Gunter house and its association in this respect is therefore of considerable importance.

David Powell

Monmouthshire Antiquarians Blog, 13 May 2020

Abergavenny and World War 11

In 2001-2, a small group of members of the Abergavenny Local History Society (ALHS) trained for in oral history techniques and recorded as many people as they could find who had lived in Abergavenny during WW2. They transcribed extracts from the recordings and produced a book called *'A Town Remembers: Memories of Wartime Abergavenny 1939 – 1945'*. Copies exist in Abergavenny Library and Gwent Archives. Fortunately, I bought one for myself, too, as it is now out-of-print!

Some of the present ALHS Research group were trying to update this knowledge and managed to make three more recordings recently. But memories of that time have faded. Marie was interviewed by David and Barbara Powell and had the clearest memories. Marie was able to reminisce about her time at school during the early part of the war. She then left to work in the telephone exchange on Frogmore Street, a responsible job as it was easy to overhear information when connecting people or checking if the line was in use. Very excitingly, towards the end of war, she also went off to London and worked on an Admiralty telephone exchange. That was something that would never have been possible if it had not been for the war and the necessity of using women to do unusual work for that time. She did not remember anything much about food rationing, except to say that she thought that they ate quite well! She remembers cycling out to play tennis near the Hardwick Inn and towards the end of the war, dancing with the American troops before she went to London. And she remembered the celebrations of VE Day in London.

One of the chapters in *'A Town Remembers'* contains the memories of those who were in the Home Guard. On May 17th 1940, the Abergavenny Chronicle reported that a new Home Front Army was to be formed by the War Office, originally called the Local Defence Volunteers. (ALHS have access to the archives of the Abergavenny Chronicle.) Glyn Lewis' father was one of the first to volunteer and said that they were jokingly called 'Look, Duck and Vanish boys'. Viv Sadler's father also volunteered and wore a long overcoat. This was shared with another recruit who was much shorter and it hung around his ankles making him look like a monk! Glyn Lewis' uncle, Cliff Newton, had been in the 3rd Mon Regiment in WW1, and he became a Captain in the LDV. Sergeant Ramsey who had served in the Brecknock Battalion, and fought in both the Boer War and the Home Service Battalion in WW1 had the difficult task of trying to train them to be 'first class irregulars'. Despite reports that they were training on rifles and improvised hand-grenades, the weapons apparently included *'thorn hedge trimmings were of great use for the Home Guard'* as reported in the Abergavenny Chronicle in January 1941. George Cobourne remembered training with broom handles at first, but had a rifle when they were issued and trained in the fields just past Nevill Hall hospital. He would often be on call for duty for a 24 hour shift in addition to his work on the farm and had regular evening shifts. David Edwards trained with the Home Guard until he was called up in 1943 and remembered some hair raising improvised weapons. John G. Williams joined up in 1940 when he was still at King Henry VIII school. Later he worked on a farm during the day and would be on duty all night once a week in a group of three or four, patrolling in the evenings at other times.

Don Davies remembers that they built a line like a railway line across Ross Road into Abergavenny. To one side were some trucks filled with concrete. The idea was that, if the German soldiers or tanks came, the trucks would be rolled across the road so that the Home Guard in the pill boxes had time to mow them down. In 2007, ALHS was contacted by someone (who preferred to remain anonymous in case it got him into trouble with the farmer). He was concerned that the pill boxes above Ross Road would be demolished for housing. He took me to see them and I took photos and contacted CADW, who were, at that time asking for WW2 remains to be recorded. CADW were able to contact the farmer and survey the site, so that they could be listed.



If you walk along Ross Road from the town and look up behind the New Junction Cottages by the river bridge, you will see the single pillbox overlooking the Ross Road and the bridge over the Gavenny River.



A further group of three nearer the town overlook Tredilion Road and Ross Road. These covered the junction of the line between Hereford and Newport and the now defunct line to Merthyr Tydfil.

The view from the three pillboxes is across the north east side of Abergavenny and towards the Sugar Loaf as well – an excellent vantage point. An air raid shelter on the edge of the slope, near where the station used to be, is well protected by a tree that has fallen across the entrance, but has the typical dogleg entrance that I remember from my childhood, but smelled of sheep rather than wet wool, urine and cigarette smoke. The shelter was provided for the workers at the Junction Station. They are all on private land, so you will need to view them from the adjoining Tredilion and Ross Roads.

Other chapters in ‘A Town Remembers’ cover the Land Girls (have a look at the ALHS Facebook page) as well as much else. Particularly, the story of the evacuees is another that we would like to tell. ALHS have commissioned two commemorative plaques for the evacuee story, one to go at Brecon Road Station (now Old Station Surgery) and the other at Park Street School (now Abergavenny Community Centre) where almost a whole Primary school from Birmingham arrived in 1939. When we are able to put these up – we were just pipped at the post by the lockdown – I will write about the background to these.

Gill Wakley

<https://monmouthshireantiquarian.blogspot.com/2020/05/abergavenny-and-world-war-11.html>