

GWENT COUNTY HISTORY ASSOCIATION ***NEWSLETTER*** ***SPRING/SUMMER 2016***

GWENT HISTORY AT THE EISTEDDFOD

The history of the county will be well represented at the National Eisteddfod at Abergavenny in August.

A large number of local organisations, including GCHA, have entered into a partnership agreement for Y Lle Hanes (The History Place), a tent featuring exhibition panels, a digital content display, a display of objects, an activities area and a bookshop. Rather than a central narrative, the exhibition, edited by Catrin Stevens of the National Library of Wales, will feature various 'titbits' on the history of the county including the Monmouthshire Coat of Arms, the Chartist Rising, Periwigs and Flannels, Viscountess Rhondda, Sailing in Monmouthshire, Building Bridges in Chepstow, and Rockfield Recording Studios.

Welsh and English speaking volunteers from various local groups will be on hand in the tent to welcome and assist visitors and a drama company Mewn Cymeriad will be performing one person shows each day. An activities programme will be coordinated by the National Museum of Wales.

Abergavenny Local History Society will be running a series of guided walks around the town. Details can be found on the Abergavenny LHS website (www.abergavennylocalhistorysociety.org.uk).

Congratulations to Gwent Archives on being awarded Archive Service Accreditation in recognition of its good performance in all aspects of its work. Tony Hopkins, County Archivist commented: 'This award ... crowns five years of hard work since moving into our new building. It has been a team effort and I am very proud of all the staff who have contributed to this achievement.'

GCHA/MAA DAY SCHOOL GWENT HISTORY THROUGH EARLY DOCUMENTARY FILM

-a series of films made between 1919 and 1970 covering the industrial, social and cultural history of the county, introduced by local speakers.

**10am-4pm Saturday 15th October,
St Michael's Centre, Penypound Rd,
Abergavenny, NP7 5UD.**

£15 per person (includes lunch and coffee).

See our website (www.gwenthistory.org.uk) or contact us for more details.

ANNUAL LECTURE 2016

We were very fortunate that our annual lecture, at St Michael's Centre Abergavenny on June 11th, was delivered by Professor Ronald Hutton of Bristol University. The subject of his lecture was '**Elizabeth I, a reunited kingdom**' - a thought provoking study of Tudor policy in relation to Scotland, Ireland and Wales. He argued that the English aim of bringing Scotland into the kingdom was achieved, but through the accession of the Stuarts rather than through conquest. He then went on to contrast the harsh treatment of the Irish with the relatively benign treatment of Wales, a contrast which, he suggests, has had consequences lasting to the present day. Had the situation been reversed, the 'troubles' which engulfed Ireland may have been a feature of modern Welsh history instead.

SIXTY YEARS ON

2016 marks the 60th anniversary of the first bulletin of the Monmouthshire Local History Council –the organisation which, after several changes of name and constitution is now part of Gwent County History Association.

The Council itself was formed in May 1954 and aimed not only to encourage the study of local history in the county but also, according to its chairman, Arthur Clark, to “democratise” the subject –by which he meant publishing material in an accessible form and ensuring that it was not the preserve of a landed class of “antiquarians”; instead becoming “part of the local heritage” belonging to everyone. Membership cost 2s6d (12.5p) for individuals and 10/6d (52.5p) for societies. In 1956 it was decided to publish a bulletin twice a year. It was intended that each would include an account of the work of one of the affiliated societies. The first issue featured the Chepstow Society –still going strong today.

The first bulletin was a rather modest affair of only four pages and apart from the chairman’s message and the report from the Chepstow Society, contained only a welcome message from the Standing Conference on Local History, an article by W.H. Baker (County Archivist) on ‘The place of the County Record Office’, a note on the Monmouthshire Collection in Newport Library and a short piece by Fred Hando called ‘Know Your Own Village’. Fred warned that:

“Within the next half century many Monmouthshire children whose homes were built on fields with Welsh names will grow up with no knowledge of their heritage. Old names, old customs, old legends and remedies, all the lovely memories of country life will be lost unless they are recorded now.”

Between 1956 and 1958 four issues of the bulletin were issued. In 1958 it was replaced by *Presenting Monmouthshire*, a twenty page journal which followed much the same format as its successor, *Gwent Local History*, the journal of GCHA. Copies of the early bulletins can be seen in Newport Reference library, where they have been bound with the early issues of *Presenting Monmouthshire*.

BEER SHOPS IN RURAL GWENT

(From *The Monmouthshire Merlin* 2nd February 1839.)

We are informed that in the parish of Llanthewy Rhydderch, near Abergavenny, some of the beer shop keepers allow their customers to play at cards and skittles to such an extent, as to be a cause of great suffering and distress to many poor families in that neighbourhood. This is manifestly a violation of their licenses, and in doing so, those persons expose themselves to the infliction of heavy penalties. Every beer shop in which practices such as those specified are tolerated, is a pest and a nuisance to the neighbourhood in which it exists, and it is the duty, as we know it is the wish, of the magistrates to punish the violators of the law.

We have received a letter this week from a correspondent, which contains particulars relative to these houses, and also naming some families who have suffered great privations, in consequence of the dissoluteness which is allowed to be practised in them We hope the constables will look to this matter, and take such measures as will put an end to scenes of extensive demoralization.

RECOMMEND A FRIEND

To keep on an even keel financially we need to increase our membership. Do you have a friend or colleague who might be interested in joining the Gwent County History Association and receiving the *Gwent Local History* journal?

If so please send us their name and address and we will send them a complimentary back issue of the journal with an invitation to join. Send details to Peter Strong, GCHA, 8 Deepweir, Caldicot, Mon NP26 5JG or strong@btinternet.com.

The 2016 Newport Chartist convention will be held at John Frost School (formerly Duffryn High School) on Saturday 5th November.

CONTACT US: Correspondence should be sent to: Kathleen Norton, Secretary GCHA, 2 Brunel Avenue, High Cross, Rogerstone, Newport, South Wales. NP10 0DN kathleen.norton@ntlworld.com.

POSSIBLE MATERIAL FOR 2016 NEWSLETTERS

HENRY VINCENT ON THE WYE TOUR -NOT YOUR USUAL TRAVELOGUE!

(From www.visionofbritain.org)

Life and rambles. Western Vindicator 30th March 1839

We were unable to get up a meeting in [Monmouth](#) this day. The town is very Torified, being under the influence of the Duke of Beaufort. The Tories played us a clever trick. We engaged a bellman to cry a meeting for the Bell Inn, at 7 o'clock, but when we went to the place of meeting we found he had not cried it, having been bribed by the Tories. At the Bell we met about fifty of them who pretended to receive us friendly, and congratulated us on our prospects of a good meeting. We were not to be caught; so we told them they had been mistaken the night, for our meeting was to be held on Monday evening; in fact we had not yet convened it. They expressed their fear that we should not be able to remain until Monday — but we assured them time was of no consequence to us, and that perhaps we might stay a month. They looked surprised, and one after another vanished from our sight. We agreed to call the meeting for Monday night.

SUNDAY, March 17. — Passed the day in [Monmouth](#). The weather cold and stormy. Walked out a short way in the country and retired to bed early.

MONDAY, March 18. — Issued bills convening a meeting of the people in the large room of the Bell. The room is spacious and well-built, capable of holding near 1000 persons. On going to the place of meeting we found the Tories had mustered to the number of at least 100 — the room was soon filled. [Burns and Vincent spoke] I challenged the Tories to a public or private discussion, but they dared not meet me. They skulked into the corners of the room, and by degrees slunk out. Three cheers were given for Vincent and Burns, three for the Convention, and the meeting dispersed. On retiring to our inn we were waited upon by several intelligent people, who undertook to form the nucleus of an association, and to obtain signatures for the National Petition.

TUESDAY, March 19. — Took coach for [Newport](#). The scenery between [Monmouth](#) and [Newport](#) is very delightful. The coach runs about four miles by the side of the river Wye. The scenery within three miles of the town of [Chepstow](#) is the finest in the three kingdoms. Ascending a hill, by the side of the Wind Cliff the traveller has a view of the Wye winding its way between rocks covered at their summits with luxuriant

foliage. In the distance may be seen the river Severn at seven points, which by a pleasing illusion, appears to overhang the Wye several hundred feet. Birds were singing — trees budding, and all vegetation putting on its virgin dress. Delightful spot! and yet to think that nearly the whole of this portion of the county of Monmouth belongs to one tyrant, *the Duke of Beaufort* . We passed the ruins of [Tintern](#) Abbey. What cunning dogs the priests have ever been! Let but the ruin of an Abbey be seen, and there we witness the most beautiful portion of a country. So it is with [Tintern](#)! I could not help thinking of the time when the priests paid more attention to the poor than they now do. They lived well themselves, but they gave more to the poor than the avaricious body of atheistical parsons connected with our Established Church. Passed the ruins of [Chepstow](#) Castle — old Cromwell seems to have played the devil with the aristocratic strongholds in these parts. Passed through the town of [Chepstow](#), and arrived in [Newport](#) at 1 o'clock. A meeting had been convened for [Newport](#) at 3 o'clock in the afternoon. Another meeting was convened for [Pontypool](#), a large town ten miles distant from [Newport](#). I accordingly arranged with Burns, and he agreed to go on to [Pontypool](#), leaving me to attend the [Newport](#) meeting. Mr. Payne, publisher of the *Vindicator* , an excellent Radical, and who suffered two year's imprisonment under the persecution of the base Whigs, for vending unstamped papers, accompanied friend Burns. The [Newport](#) meeting was held out-of-doors, in the afternoon. Several hundred people attended, among whom were a great number of ladies. On ascending the hustings we were loudly cheered. [Meeting chaired by Dickenson; Vincent spoke for 'nearly two hours'] In the evening at seven o'clock from 3000 to 4000 persons assembled upon the same spot. [Meeting chaired by Edward Thomas; Vincent spoke 'at great length'] ... and the meeting separated. The people followed us through the streets to our home, loudly cheering us all the way. On the same evening Burns addressed a good meeting of the people of [Pontypool](#).

WEDNESDAY, March 20. — Convened a meeting for the ladies of [Newport](#) in the Bush Inn. The meeting was well attended by the wives and daughters of the respectable middle and working classes. Miss Dickenson, the daughter of our excellent Radical friend Dickenson, was called to the chair. [Thomas and Vincent spoke] At the conclusion of the ladies meeting, in consequence of the night being wet, a large meeting of the men took place in the same room, and was addressed at great length by Burns, Payne of Bristol, and myself. When the meeting was over the people would make me sing "The Democrat" — they joining in the chorus with great spirit. I never witnessed more enthusiasm. The people swear they will have the Charter.

THURSDAY, March 21. — Took the steam packet for [Bristol](#). Had a trip of not more than three hours.

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**“UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF
AQUARIUS”**

Recent news that in some supermarkets milk was cheaper than bottled water is a reminder of the time when water itself was an expensive commodity delivered to the door.

Interviewed by the *South Wales Argus* in 1927, 100 year old Mary Honeywill of Newport remembered the days of the water carriers, before people had water piped into their homes:

“... water was hawked through the streets by Ben Davies, a Chartist who only had one arm, and Solomon (*sic*) Meaker. The water was contained in a large barrel on a cart drawn by a horse, and was sold at from a halfpenny to a penny per pail, according to the size of the receptacle. It was only drinking water that was sold in this way.”

Both were well known ‘characters’ who delivered water around Newport for many years, sometimes in an alarming way, as reported by the *Monmouthshire Merlin* (30th March 1840):

“The drivers of water carts in this good town have apparently a licence to dash or drive as furiously through the streets, as if hastening with the elements for the ‘cold water cure’ headless of the risk ... Last Tuesday, two of this genus came up though Commercial-street -one each side of two waggons slowly progressing along- after lashing their poor jaded animals into a terrible gallop, they raced with Nutwith* speed towards Bane’s Well. On coming just opposite the Town Hall, one of the drivers ... brought his rear well suddenly in contact with a large ‘gout’ stone, which immediately checked the horse, and flung the whole concern spinning into the middle of the road. The driver was dismounted from his striding position across the water butt ... (He) was soon able to pick himself up ...

This furious driving should be checked. We have heard many complaints that such dangerous work is almost a daily occurrence –in fact that we are under the influence of Aquarius- and yet it has never been heard of , that a single charge has been preferred by the ‘detective force’ against the constantly offending parties.”

Ben Davies and Soloman Meaker, in all probability the two water carriers mentioned above, were both well known characters in the town, and delivered water for many years. The circumstances by which Davies lost his arm were described by Dr William Morgan, an eye-witness to the Newport Chartist Rising of 1839:

“Afterwards, I heard that there was a man up Water’s Court who had had arm broken with a bullet. I went up, and found the man there. He said he was going post-office to post letters, when he was hit by a bullet from the (Westgate) hotel ... but when we tried to move him we found that he had a long sword down his trousers leg. ‘You hypocrite,’ I said, ‘pretending you were going to the post-office with letters when you had a murderous weapon down your leg –I’ll have nothing to do with you.’ I left him and he afterwards had his arm amputated. For years after there was a one-armed man who drove the water cart ... That was the man.”

Meaker was well known to the local magistrates. See our next issue for more on him.

*Nutwith: a famous race horse of the 1840s.

(MM 10.5.1878.)

In 1878 Meaker was again up before the magistrate, this time charged with perjury In a (the) case in which “his” mule had bitten a child he had sworn that he was not aware that the mule had kicked anybody before. Police Sergeant Winmill gave evidence in which he stated:

“I remember seeing Meaker’s mule on Clytha Park Road, in July 1877; it ran at me with its mouth wide open, and kicked at me. A few days later I met Meaker with his mule, at the bottom of Bailey Street, and he told me that the mule was his. I told him that it was a very dangerous animal strolling about the streets, and that it would surely bring him into trouble I told him it was the most vicious thing I ever saw.”

(LONG/GOOD REPORT WITH MORE DETAILS)

He was acquitted on a technicality. (See 2/8/78

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There is movement afoot in Blaenafon which I have heard of but not officially. Seems the Library is to move into the World Heritage Centre (WHC) with a loss of space for any visiting groups etc and the Cordel Museum is to move to the Workman's Hall. Seems the Hall's committee do not want them there. It would be better if the museum went to the WHC.

The proposal is to maintain the Museum and Art Gallery in the central building through joint working with Libraries to operate front of house functions more efficiently and reducing curatorial support to a minimum.

This proposal is linked to the outcome of the Libraries review as the Central Library/Museum building is a shared facility

Possible reduction in opening hours, activities and events,

exhibitions and research and enquiry services

Initial loss of a range of services including reduced numbers of exhibitions, holiday workshops and enquiry service, however mitigation will be sought wherever possible by the improved operational practices and the greater involvement of the citizens of Newport

Newport Museum and Art Gallery is Wales' second oldest Museum and opened in 1888. The

Museum and Gallery offers a visitor experience 34 hrs over 5 days per week for 51 weeks of the year. The provision extends over three floors

of the central Museum Art Gallery and central Library building. The Museum and Art Gallery is Accredited through the Arts Council England

Accreditation Scheme (This extends to Wales and was formerly run by the Museums and Galleries Commission)

Museum and Gallery provides a programme of exhibitions, permanent displays, and enquiries service and a range of learning activities for all ages. The Museum manages diverse

collections including archaeology, social history, natural history fine and decorative arts. The early peoples and Roman collections, Chartist collection and 20th

century Art are of particular importance.

The Museum has currently has 15.9 FTE staff.

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NEWS IN BRIEF

BEER SHOPS.—We are informed that in the parish of Llanthewy Rhydderch, near Abergavenny, some of the beer shop keepers allow their customers to play at cards and skittles to such an extent, as to be a cause of great suffering and distress to many poor families in that neighbourhood. This is manifestly a violation of their licenses, and in doing so, those persons expose themselves to the infliction of heavy penalties. Every beer shop in which practices such as those specified are tolerated, is a pest and a nuisance to the neighbourhood in which it exists, and it is the duty, as we know it is the wish, of the magistrates to punish the violators of the law. We have received a letter this week from a correspondent, which contains particulars relative to these houses, and also naming some families who have suffered great privations, in consequence of the dissoluteness which is allowed to be practised in them We hope the

constables will look to this matter, and take such measures as will put an end to scenes of extensive demoralization. (MM 2.2.39.)

RAGLAND CASTLE.—A small family party from Bristol were recently visiting the splendid ruins of Ragland and, proceeding along the battlements, one of them, a little girl about ten years of age, incautiously opened an umbrella which she had, when a sharp gust of wind suddenly coming on, it caught the open gingham, and carried it and her clean off the parapet. Mademoiselle, however, had the presence of mind to hold hard by her umbrella, and the result was, that after being for a moment poised in the air, she was safely deposited in the courtyard by the aid of her impromptu parachute, which was at once her bane and antidote, as without its buoyant aid, she must have been dashed to pieces.

-MM 18.9.47.

Sir- I should like to be informed who has the management of the lighting of the public lamps in the town of Monmouth, as I observe some are lighted and others are not. Whether it is from the neglect of the lamplighter, or for want of gas, I am at a loss to know. I also observe that the lamps are much broken. I suppose, owing to the high floods in the River Wye, glass cannot be imported from Bristol? I should like an inquiry made in your valuable paper.

Yours

A CONSTANT READER

(Monmouthshire Beacon 1.2.1840.)

THE NEW POOR LAW

...Most of your readers must be aware that dissatisfaction at the rigid regulations of the new poor law is not confined to the working classes, but is extensively entertained by the small capitalists forming the majority of actual rate-payers.

I am not aware that in the Monmouth Union the expectations of economy have been realised ... Individually, my own rates are increased, one-third on the same occupancy, and the gross expenditure of the small parish in which I live is also increased ...

Passing by this, I will venture to say that the warmest advocates for an amendment of the old poor law were astonished at the unnecessary and ... unmerciful changes that form the basis of the new.

I admit that the workhouse system, under the old law, was inefficient, especially in small parishes where, indeed, it was necessarily so. Workhouses, to be efficient, must be on a large scale. They are, unfortunately, necessary as a protection against the claims of the underserving poor; but surely, that man must be devoid of the feelings of humanity, who

can maintain that they ought to be used as a barrier against the wants of the aged, the sick, the married, the widow, and the orphan.

The rate-payers never desired such a sacrifice. They would view with disgust a saving wrung from the deserving poor, and of which, as neighbours, they never would have deprived them, even had the saving resulted to themselves –how much more so, when it is expended in salarizing a multitude of officials, and in raising prison work-houses to incarcerate persons charged with nio fault but poverty, a disgrace to the free soil on which they stand.

The virtual subversion of the distinction between poverty and crime is the fundamental principle of the new poor law. Had the distribution of pecuniary relief , and the selection of its objects, been left with parochial boards, acting under the immediate eye of the rate-payers, and intimately acquainted with the character and all other distinctive features of each case of distress, those claimants alone, whose demands were an imposition on the Christian principle of the old poor laws for the relief of the poor, would have been consigned to a work-house –I mean those who would have preferred a life of vagrant idleness to earning the bread of honest industry –those, in short, who would not work. The ratepayer would never have condemned, to the alternative of imprisonment or starvation, those whose destitution was the consequence of misfortune, which themselves one day might possibly have to meet...

To those of the destitute poor, who now obtain from the Board of Guardians (though in contravention of the original orders from Somerset House) a little relief out of the ork-house, it is the extreme hardship to be forced to apply, day after day, at the residence of the relieving officer, living at a distance of several miles, whose business it is never to be at home, and then to wait the decision of a distant board, guided by statements made in the absence of the applicants ...

From Sir, yours respectfully,
A COUNTRY RATE-PAYER
(Monmouthshire Beacon 1.2.1840.)