

THANKS MARTIN

At our AGM in June, Martin Culliford vacated the chairmanship of the Gwent County History Association after holding the post since the organisation was formed in the late 1990s.

Martin has always been a man with big ideas and it was his vision that led to the project to create a major county history, to the subsequent formation of the GCHA for this purpose, and to Professor Ralph Griffiths becoming the General Editor.

There were some at the time who thought that the scheme would never get off the ground, particularly when we experienced early funding difficulties and were rejected by the Heritage Lottery Fund. Yet Martin 'kept the faith' and was subsequently proved correct.

The publication of the final volume marked the culmination of a long period of service to the cause of local history in Gwent. He was a founder member of Newport Local History Society in 1984 and remains its president. He played a leading role in the campaign to save Newport Transporter Bridge from demolition.

In recent years he has been travelling all the way from west Wales to our meetings, a

clear sign of his commitment to the Association.

In recognition of his vital contribution, the GCHA committee has awarded Martin life membership of the Association.

2016 GCHA AGM: ADVANCE NOTICE

Our 2016 AGM will be held on Saturday June 11th.

We are very fortunate that the annual lecture, to follow the business session, will be delivered by **Professor Ronald Hutton of Bristol University**. Professor Hutton is an expert on the early modern period and on British folklore. He frequently appears on television and radio and is an extremely engaging lecturer. The subject of his lecture will be **'Elizabeth I, a reunited kingdom'** - a thought provoking study of Tudor policy, particularly contrasting policy in Wales with that in Ireland, a contrast which, he suggests, has had consequences lasting to the present day. Not to be missed!

Put the date in your diary now!

We hope you will make every effort to attend. Details of venue etc will be issued in due course.

EISTEDDFOD IN GWENT: HOW TIMES CHANGE

In August 2016 the National Eisteddfod will be returning to Gwent, being held in Abergavenny. County Councillors have overwhelmingly welcomed the forthcoming celebration of Welsh culture. As recently as the 1970s, however, there was strong opposition to such events, as this report from the *Weekly Argus*, 4th July 1974, shows:

“A Gwent county councilor, who attended the National Eisteddfod of Wales last year, felt like someone in a foreign country because everyone spoke Welsh. Councillor Ron Wellington told the county council’s central committee that he attended the Eisteddfod on behalf of Cwmbran. No English was spoken except in special announcements.

He felt as if he were in a foreign land. The eisteddfod organisers should make some effort to cater for nine-tenths of the nation who did not speak Welsh. The committee agreed to recommend that the county council should not be represented at the eisteddfod this year.

Councillor Keith Griffiths said the former Monmouthshire county council had asked the eisteddfod organisers to consider the English speaking people but had received no reply.



The Proclamation ceremony for the 2016 Eisteddfod was held at Caldicot Castle in June 2015.

He said to send representatives would bolster up something which was in urgent need of reform. The electors who sent councilors to county hall were English-speaking and they were completely ostracised.

Councillor David Williams said that while he agreed with much of the opposition to sending representatives, it was important to be fighting to change the system at the eisteddfod. And Councillor S.R. Baldwin said many people from Gwent went to the eisteddfod, including brass bands and choirs.”

MONMOUTHSHIRE: ENGLAND OR WALES?

In 1916, when the government introduced blackout regulations as a precaution against Zeppelin attacks, Newport shopkeepers complained that they were not allowed to light their shop windows because Monmouthshire was being treated as part of England rather than as part of Wales where restrictions were much less strict. (*Weekly Argus* 9.9.1916, 14.10.1916.)

NEW PUBLICATIONS

Render the Chartists Defenceless by Les James, former Newport Museum Education Officer and Senior Lecturer at the University of Wales, Newport, published by Three Impostors, Newport, £10.00 (www.threeimpostors.co.uk). An analysis of the ‘hidden agenda’ behind the conversations between the Newport Chartist leaders and ship’s surgeon on board the prison ship Mandarin in 1840.

Men Who Played the Game: sportsmen who gave their lives in the Great War by Newport author Mike Rees. For more information go to www.serenboks.com/shop/history.

OUR AFFILIATED ORGANISATIONS

Sixteen local history societies are currently affiliated to the Gwent County History Association:

- *Abergavenny Local History Society
- *Abertillery and District Museum Society
- *Bedwas and Trethomas Local History Group
- *Brynmawr Historical Society
- *Caldicot and District Local History Society
- *The Chepstow Society
- *Cwmbran Historical Society
- *Cwmynysoy History Group
- *Glamorgan Gwent Archaeological Trust
- *Gwent Family History Society, Chepstow Branch
- *Llanfoist & District History Society
- *Monmouth Field and History Society
- *Monmouthshire Antiquarian Association
- *Oxford House Industrial Archaeological Society
- *Shirenewton Local History Society
- *Friends of Usk Castle

Representatives of these organisations meet about three times a year as Gwent Local History Council to swap ideas and discuss matters of common interest (e.g. ideas for speakers).

Is your organisation affiliated? If not, suggest it at your next meeting. Society membership is £15.00.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR INDEXING

GCHA is looking for volunteers to help index recent issues of our journal, *Gwent Local History*. If you are interested please get in touch.

IN BRIEF

REMARKABLE FIND: An 800 year old 30 cm long silver and gold gilded cruciform, said to be 'priceless', has been discovered by a metal detectorist in a field near Newport. The discovery was made by Malcolm Corfield, a member of the Gwent Detecting Club, in August 2014. The cruciform, which was probably used as a charm against plague, contains a Hebrew inscription 'Ate gebir leilam adonal', meaning 'thou art mighty forever oh Lord'.

BID TO BUY HISTORIC HOUSE: The Welsh Georgian Trust is reported to be in negotiation with the owners regarding the purchase of Gunter Mansion in Cross Street Abergavenny. The Grade 2 listed house was a centre of illegal Catholic worship in the 17th century. Saint David Lewis, executed in Usk in 1679, conducted masses there. The campaign is supported by Abergavenny Local History Society.

GWENT IN THE GREAT WAR EXHIBITION

A 'pop-up exhibition' comprising 20 free-standing banners is available free of charge to any organisation wishing to use it. The exhibition was prepared jointly by Gwent Archives and Gwent Branch of the Western Front Association.

The exhibition is particularly suitable for libraries, museums, schools, village halls. It is normally bookable for a fortnight, although longer and shorter periods are possible. We will deliver, set up and collect.

For details contact Pete Strong on strong@btinternet.com or 01291 425638.

SEARCH FOR OLD RECORDS

(from the *South Wales Gazette* 11th September 1941

Students of local history will be interested in the view expressed by Mr Conway Davies M.A., Archivist to Monmouthshire County Council, that the demand for waste paper is causing many irreplaceable records to be lost for ever.

In the course of an address to the Monmouthshire and Caerleon Antiquarian Association, Mr Davies traced the history of Monmouthshire and said that the first Sheriff of the county was appointed in 1540 and the first writ for Parliamentary representation of the county was issued in 1541. Although the first Quarter Sessions in the county sat in 1542 the first records traced of the proceedings of that court were in 1719.

Tens of thousands of papers had been searched for records of the intervening period without success so far, but the most likely places –old mansions and the store rooms of old established firms of solicitors –had not yet been searched.*

It was on record, he said, that ...Herbert Jones, a Clerk of the Peace and under-Sheriff, was summoned before the Court of Quarter Sessions for failing to keep records of the decisions of the Court. In 1720 ... As far back as 1813 the question was discussed of a proper place in which to keep county records.

*Quarter Session records dating from 1576-77 were subsequently discovered in Tredegar House among the Tredegar papers. For details see *Law and Disorder in Tudor Monmouthshire* by Ben Howell (Merton Priory Press 1995).

Congratulations to GCHA member Paul Murphy, former MP for Torfaen, who was elevated to the House of Lords in the Dissolution Honours List.

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.

ON THE CIRCUIT

While doing the round of local societies giving talks on local history I often hear anecdotes from members of the audience. I share a couple below.

THE PEA PICKERS OF PILL

Wendy Merrick recalls that when she was a child living in Llanfair Discoed, families from Newport Pill would arrive each year on the service bus carrying galvanised buckets and spend the day working at gathering the pea-harvest. These were what politicians nowadays call 'hard working families' but being 'townies' they were regarded with some suspicion by the villagers. Wendy was anxious to go to play with the children but was firmly warned by her mother to stay away from 'the pea-pickers'.

GLASCOED UNDER FIRE

On a darker note, a member of Newport Friendship Circle, recalled an event that happened while he was working at the Royal Ordnance Factory at Glascoed during the Second World War. A German plane had located the factory by following the railway line up from Newport. As male and female workers came out of the factory buildings for a break they saw the plane and some, mistaking it for a British plane, waved. In their white overalls, the workers were highly visible. The plane opened fire with machine guns. A woman from Caerleon was hit in the legs and left permanently disabled. (PS)

HISTORIC CHURCHES

Looking for some interesting historic churches to visit? Details of open churches can be found on the Churches Tourism Network Wales website: <http://www.ctnw.co.uk>.

BEVAN LECTURE AT GWENT ARCHIVES

Nick Thomas-Symonds, Member of Parliament for Torfaen will give a lecture on Nye Bevan at Gwent Archives, Ebbw Vale, on Friday December 11th at 3pm. Admission is free but must be booked in advance from Gwent Archives (01495 353363).

