

# ***GWENT COUNTY HISTORY ASSOCIATION***

## ***NEWSLETTER***

## ***AUTUMN 2019***

### **EXPLORING THE GWENT LEVELS AT OUR DAY SCHOOL**

The day school organised jointly by GCHA, Monmouthshire Antiquarian Association and Redwick History Group on September 28<sup>th</sup> was a great success.

The day was kicked off by Gavin Jones, Community Engagement Officer with the Living Levels Project, who outlined ways in which the project is working with farmers and other residents to preserve and enhance this unique landscape and its wildlife. It is also seeking to enhance local identification with the Levels through promoting historical research.

Oliver Blackmore outlined the importance of finds from the Levels to the new prehistoric displays currently in preparation at Newport Museum. The museum has an important collection of prehistoric material, including bones of bison, mammoth and brown bear found in a cave at Caerwent and dating from 120,000 years ago. The oldest human made item is a Mesolithic handaxe from Sudbrook. The new displays will make the collection more accessible.

Mark Lewis spoke about the Great Flood of 1607 which engulfed the whole of the Levels, arguing that it was caused by a storm surge and clearly refuting ideas that it was a tsunami. He put the flood in the context of other floods, before and since, and also in the context of the climate change emergency, which is becoming a real and present danger to the area.

After an excellent buffet lunch, Barbara Ward introduced us to the work of Hubert Jones, Redwick farmer and historian, who collected a wealth of material on the history of the village and was responsible for the famous 'bus shelter' full of historical curiosities, which stands at the centre of the village.

This was followed by a tour of the village led by Redwick History Group which took in, amongst other things, the flood mark, the site of a grave of Crimean War veteran, the village pound and the site of a bomb dropped on the village during the Second World War. The tour concluded with a talk about Redwick Church by Canon Arthur Edwards.

In the final talk of the day Peter Strong spoke about agriculture on the Levels during the period of the two world wars. He explained how the government and farmers were often in dispute during both wars over the government's insistence that large quantities of pasture should be ploughed up for the planting of cereals.

At the end of the day, food left over from the buffet was taken to a hostel for the homeless in Newport.

We are grateful to the Mon Ants and Redwick History Group for their involvement and to the Living levels Project for financial assistance.

#### **ARE YOU GETTING OUR EMAILS?**

In addition to sending this newsletter out with Issue 126 it will be sent out by email. **If you have an email address but haven't received the newsletter by email please let us know since it means that we don't have your correct details.** Clearly it helps us to keep costs down if we can send correspondence (e.g. renewal notices and AGM details) by email rather than post.

#### **GET INTO PRINT**

We are always on the lookout for articles for our journal, *Gwent County History*. There is no minimum length for articles and help will be given on matters such as style and editing. So, don't hide that research under the bed, share it with the world! As well as being distributed to GCHA members, copies of our journal go to all four UK national libraries and to Harvard University Library in the USA.

## EXTRAORDINARY FEAT

(From the Monmouthshire Merlin 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1839)

On Saturday last a boy about seven years of age, son of a person named William Solomans, of Risca, undertook, for a wager of a sovereign, to run from Risca to Newport with the Tredegar Coach, and to reach the Post-office in this town before it. Accordingly, the child started from Risca with the coach, and kept with it until they reached the top of Stow Hill, when he quickened his pace down the steep descent and outstripped the coach, winning the wager, to the delight of everyone who witnessed the extraordinary performance. The distance is about seven miles, and it was completed in 45 minutes. Considering the age of the boy, we think this a feat almost unprecedented.

## A DEPRESSING FACT

In 1988 Newport Museum had 12 staff. It now has three.

## BOOKS FOR SALE

Caldicot Local History Society has been given a quantity of pre-owned local history books to be sold to raise money for the 'Sparkle Appeal'. This raises funds for the Serennu Children's Centre at Rogerstone, which does excellent work in helping children with severe disabilities.

The books, which include several by Ivor Waters, are being sold at prices which are usually significantly below those charged on the internet. For a list, contact Pete Strong on [strong@btinternet.com](mailto:strong@btinternet.com) or 01291 425638.

## RECOMMEND A FRIEND

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? To keep on an even keel financially we need to increase our membership. Please send us their name and address and we will send them a complimentary back issue of the journal with an invitation to join.

## AN ILL WIND

*The fact that the ancient custom of 'liberating' goods from wrecked ships survived in Gwent into the 20<sup>th</sup> century is demonstrated by the following report from the Western Mail, 27th December 1900:*

### THE WRECK IN THE BRISTOL CHANNEL THE CARGO WASHING ASHORE

The general cargo of the steamer Brunswick, which ran onto a sandbank opposite Clevedon on Sunday night whilst on a voyage from Liverpool to Bristol is washing ashore in various directions. A great many boxes of bacon were cast up on the beach at Goldcliff, in Monmouthshire, on Tuesday, and floating wreckage and boxes of merchandise are also being carried into the River Usk with the tide. The strict duty of the public to hand any such findings over to the customs authorities is brought home by the fact that at Newport on Wednesday a boatman named James Williams, living at 14, Ebenezer Terrace, who keeps his boat near the Spit anchorage at the mouth of the Usk, picked up a box of bacon, was brought up on a charge of stealing it. Mr. Massy, the Collector of Customs, was the prosecutor. Williams was remanded on bail till to-morrow.

*(When the case reconvened the following day, Mr Massey said he did not wish to press the charge, merely to make the law known. The magistrates therefore took a lenient view and fined Williams five shillings.)*

## CHARTISM EMAG

If you are interested in the Chartist Movement in Gwent and beyond, check out the free Chartism emag on [thecharists.org](http://thecharists.org) (or just Google Chartism Magazine).

**IMPORTANT NOTICE: Our bank has informed us that in future cheques must include our full name: Gwent County History Association. GCHA etc will not be accepted.**

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