

# **GWENT COUNTY HISTORY ASSOCIATION**

## **NEWSLETTER**

## **AUTUMN 2017**

### **THANKS TO KATH. CHANGES AT THE TOP**

After almost eight years as our Secretary, Kath Norton has retired from the post. Kath took over the position at a very difficult time for the Association, following the death of Gwenllian Jones in 2009.

Her quiet efficiency has been central to the work of the Association, carrying out the essential behind-the-scenes administrative work in an exemplary way.

She saw our founding project, the publication of the five volume history of Gwent through to completion, a task that required considerable patience and diplomacy.

Kath has also been Secretary of the Gwent Local History Council since it became independent from the Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations and part of GCHA, also representing Oxford House Industrial Archaeological Society on GLHC. We are delighted to say that she plans to continue in both roles.

#### **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.

**CONTACT US:** Correspondence should be sent to: Peter Strong, GCHA, 8 Deepweir, Caldicot, Monmouthshire NP26 5JG strong@btinternet.com

#### **1918- JOURNEYS END -2018**

GCHA has given its support to a lottery funded project by Gwent branch of the Western Front Association to commemorate the centenary of the 1918 armistice.

The 'Journey's End' project is centred on Newport but it is open to individuals, groups and communities throughout Gwent. Planned activities include:

\*Monthly guided tours of the war graves of St Woolos cemetery, Bassaleg Road (2<sup>nd</sup> Wednesday of each month from January 2018).

\*Unveiling a plaque to Annie Brewer, one of the most highly decorated wartime nurses. (January)

\*Training sessions on use of World War One archives. (Gwent Archives, February and May).

\*Unveiling a plaque and photograph at St Woolos Hospital to mark its role as a military hospital (July).

\*A day of activities, talks, film, music etc at St Woolos Cathedral (Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> November).

Contact us for further details.



#### **HELP WANTED**

GCHA is seeking fresh blood to join our committee. In particular we are seeking people to assist with secretarial duties (e.g. writing minutes). To coin a phrase, "no experience necessary as full training will be given". If you think you can help, get in touch.

#### **FRED'S BACK**

Good to see that the *South Wales Argus* has started to reprint articles written by Fred Hando. Fred wrote and illustrated 800 articles covering every part of Gwent, inspiring many people to take an interest in local history in the process. The articles will be published on Thursdays.

## MURDER MOST FOUL IN LLANGWM

Fascinating evidence to support a piece of village folklore was revealed during our visit to St Jerome's Church during the MAA/GCHA day school at Llangwm in July.

We were told how, while digging a drain at the church, builders uncovered a gravestone which carried the inscription 'Craddock'. It is thought that this could be the gravestone of Walter Craddock, the well-known Puritan preacher who helped to form the first independent church in Wales at Llanvaches in 1638.

Some of the inscription is indecipherable but another part of it reads:

'Here lyeth the body of Elizabeth/Gwyn, the wife of Craddock Gwyn of this/Parish who was murdered in her own home ... of ...1743/Aged 31 years/ ...body that/Bloody villain/Who coveted both gold and hand ...only be'.

Local legend has it that there was a murder at Pwll Farm and visitors are to this day shown 'bloodstains' at the bottom of the stairs.

(Additional information from <http://friendsoffriendlesschurches.org.uk>)

## PONTYPOOL: THE NEW BATH?

Judging by the following article from *The Cambrian*, 6<sup>th</sup> May 1809, Pontypool missed its opportunity to become a spa town on a par with Jane Austen's Bath:

A respectable correspondent at Pontypool has furnished us with the following extraordinary occurrence: A young man, of the name of William Davies, who belongs to the Monmouthshire Western Local Militia Band, finding himself unwell, applied for medical assistance, but obtaining no relief, went to Pontypool, and was advised to drink some mineral water in the neighbourhood.

Having done so, he soon afterwards vomited a creature similar to a lizard, in length about seven inches from head to tail, with eyes, two rows of teeth, six up and six down, and four claws or feet exactly like those of the lizard. Davies says he was subject to very sudden startings from the gnawing of the creature, but he is now fast recovering, and there is no doubt of his getting quite well. The virtues of the water above alluded to not being generally known, we think the faculty cannot too early direct their attention to it.

## 83 WEDS 80 -SHIRENEWTON WORTHY'S 3<sup>RD</sup> WIFE

Mr Thomas Richards, ex-Chairman of the Shirenewton Parish Council, has just taken to himself a third wife in Mrs Ridler, a widow, aged 80, while her second husband is three years her senior. All is well with the Shirenewton worthy, who is well known for his advanced views on political and local topics. He gained notoriety for his pronounced attitude during the Boer War, and the demonstrations made against him in the village, which embraced the burning of his effigy, in no way incensed him, and nothing that was said or done made him change his opinions. Mr Richards is an extremely smart

and active man, and believed in hard work and early rising. He is an ardent Liberal and a strong Baptist, having been publicly baptised. His new wife has lived in the village many years and prior to the death of her first husband resided with him at the Tredegar Arms, when there were six licensed houses in the village. The bridegroom is proud of the fact that he has been a teetotaler 59 years and has never smoked. He knows the exact number of spinsters in the parish, and can tell you that there are living in Shirenewton today 35 widows and 7 widowers.

-*Weekly Argus*, 18<sup>th</sup> September 1920