

# ***GWENT COUNTY HISTORY ASSOCIATION***

## ***NEWSLETTER***

## ***AUTUMN 2020***

As Christmas approaches we find ourselves still living under restrictions that make it impossible for GCHA and its affiliated societies to operate normally.

Nevertheless, a great deal is going on in different ways. People have still been researching and writing and articles have continued to be submitted for publication in our journal, *Gwent Local History*. Tony Hopkins, our editor, has been busy preparing the latest issue for publication.

Several societies have been holding meetings over the internet by using programmes such as Zoom. The response has generally been encouraging, with people who initially thought 'it's not for me' increasingly finding that, once they try it, it can work well for them. One positive result is that some people who are unhappy about going out to meetings on dark winter nights can now join in from their own homes. Oxford House Industrial Archaeological Society are opening their museum at Risca on Saturday mornings subject to social distancing when restrictions allow.

The annual Newport Chartist Convention was moved back from early November to December in the hope that face to face meeting would be possible by then. When it became clear that this was not going to be possible, the event was moved online.

Pride of place for the most innovative approach must go to Llangwm Local History Society, which held a successful 'drive-in' meeting. Members sat in their cars at Usk showground while the talk was broadcast to them through their car radios.

We sincerely hope that the next issue of this newsletter will be able to report that we are getting back to at least some degree of normality. In the meantime, take care and keep safe.

**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.**

### **TRIBUTE TO RORKE'S DRIFT V.C.**

Monmouth Field and History Society (in association with Monmouth Civic Society) has produced a booklet reprinting newspaper reports about the Rorke's Drift Victoria Cross winner William Allan. The publication is part of a campaign to have a blue plaque placed on the building near where he lived and died.

Having joined the army at a young age, Allan served in various parts of the Empire. He was awarded the V.C. for carrying up ammunition boxes while wounded in the arm. He later became Sergeant-Instructor to the company of South Wales Borderers Volunteers based at Monmouth.



### **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.

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

## FILM: 'TIME AND TIDE – 12000 YEARS ON THE GWENT LEVELS'

The Living Levels Landscape Partnership has produced a five minute animated film 'Time and Tide – 12,000 years on the Gwent Levels' which recounts the incredible story of the Gwent Levels landscape from its formation at the end of the last Ice Age through to the modern era.

The film has been created by South Wales video and animation production company **Tree Top Films**, with a script by local poet and writer Conor Simmons and narration by voice actor Bronwen Price, in Welsh and English.

The history of the Gwent Levels is deeply intertwined with human occupation, from when they were first explored by Mesolithic hunter gatherers to the creation of sea defences and drainage channels which characterise the landscape today. The film explores themes of human occupation, landscape engineering and natural forces which have combined to create the unique landscape of the Gwent Levels.

Both English and Welsh versions of the film can be viewed on the Living Levels Facebook page (Facebook.com/ourlivinglevels), Living Levels Vimeo channel (<https://vimeo.com/user101785626>), and website ([www.livinglevels.org.uk](http://www.livinglevels.org.uk)).

## ARE YOU GETTING OUR EMAILS?

If you received this newsletter only through the post, this may be because you don't have email or don't wish to give us your email address. (Including this one, *you would have received three email newsletters this year rather than two by post*). This is fine and we will continue to contact you by post. It is also possible, however, that you are happy to be contacted by email but that we don't have a correct email address for you. If you think you are in the latter category email Pete Strong, GCHA Secretary on [strong@btinternet.com](mailto:strong@btinternet.com) and we will add you to our mailing list. Clearly, it saves GCHA money if we can avoid postal charges by contacting you electronically.

## CHRISTMAS IN GWENT 200 YEARS AGO

(from the 'Monmouthshire Merlin'  
19<sup>th</sup> December 1829)

Shall we pass without comment the approach of Christmas? Pshaw! cries the lover of antiquated customs - we no longer have a Christmas. It is now but a name. The recollection of a delightful dream-like memory, of a joyous pageant, whose gaiety and excitement are no more. How sad it is that men should fritter away the enjoyments of the present, by unavailing regret for fancied deprivation. Christmas is still a period of religious congratulation and of innocent revelry. Are we for ever to be deafened with the praise of hospitable castles and generous barons, as if, forsooth, the hall of the feudal banquet was to be compared in comfort or splendour with the dining parlour of the modern country gentleman; or the coarse fare, with which the oaken tables of our forefathers were weighed down, to the more luxurious viands that decorate the polished mahogany of their descendants. If the serf is no longer fed at the expense of his lord, it is because the state of vassalage has ceased to exist; and because every man, however humble, would rather eat his own hard-earned beef and pudding at his own board, in the bosom of his own family, than crouch and beg like a hungry dog, at the table of a capricious master. Great stress is laid by some romantic writers upon the abolition of many fantastic observances; the loss of which they would persuade us, has given a death blow to the pleasures of this once happy festival. We know of little that we would wish to see revived, except, perhaps, some of those primitive pastimes, in which the young and the old were accustomed to join -the former indulging in all the gladsome flow of hilarity congenial to their disposition and the latter relaxing from the frigidity of their age's winter, to enjoy for a time the cloudless sunshine of vernal life. No Matter —whatever Christmas may have lost— whatever it may lose from the lapse of years, or the progress of intellectual refinement, it must for ever stand venerable in the calendar of the Christian, as the anniversary of that day when the Son of Man came into the world, to suffer all the infirmities of the flesh, and ultimately to die for the expiation of our sins.