

GWENT COUNTY HISTORY ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2020

This issue of the GCHA newsletter is being sent out with the latest issue of our journal, *Gwent Local History*. To use a word much favoured in recent months, the journal has been produced in 'unprecedented' circumstances. Special thanks are therefore due to our editor, Tony Hopkins, for his excellent work in preparing it for publication and to our printers.

At the time of writing, as a result of Covid-19 regulations, we still face continued restrictions on our movements and to our ability to meet together in groups, meaning that most activities of GCHA and our affiliated organisations remain suspended.

Our AGM, due to be held this June, was postponed and as yet it is not possible to say when and how it will be held.

Many charities and voluntary organisations face considerable financial difficulties as a result of 'lockdown'.

GCHA is better off than most in this regard since very little of our income depends on face to face contact. We also have sufficient reserves to keep going for the immediate future. Nevertheless, a significant number of members have delayed renewing their subscriptions, meaning that we face a sizeable, and ultimately unsustainable, operating loss. **If you have not renewed, please do so.** If you are not sure if you have renewed, contact the secretary at the address below.

In the meantime, take care and keep safe.

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

THE BEER SEEKERS

A piece in the Sunday Mirror from 26th August 1945 reminds us of shortages that continued after the end of the Second World War:

If it's beer they're seeking, owners of carrier pigeons released from war service are using the "pigeon post" to find it. Monmouthshire workmen have a bird they've named "The Beer Diviner" for the job. The pigeon goes out with a searcher on a bike or motorcycle. If the searcher finds a pub with beer, he sends the pigeon off with a message. And thirsty men waiting at the loft descend on the pub.

ARE YOU GETTING OUR EMAILS?

If you have email but haven't received any emails from us, it may be because we have the incorrect address. Please email the secretary on strong@btinternet.com so that you can receive messages –and save us some money in the process.

2020 NEWPORT CHARTIST CONVENTION

The annual Newport Chartist Convention, initially due to be held on 7th November, is being rescheduled. At time of writing it is planned to hold it at St Woolos Cathedral on Saturday 5th December.

GET INTO PRINT

We are always on the lookout for articles for our journal, *Gwent Local 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.

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.

THE LIVING SEAS PROJECT

Do you have memories about marine mammals? Stories about sharks or salmon or about your time on a boat? If so, The Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales (WTSWW) want to hear from you!

'The Sea and Me' is part of The Living Seas Wales Project, launched in 2018 and funded thanks to the players of The People's Postcode Lottery and The National Heritage Lottery Fund.

Our Living Seas Wales team are looking to understand how our seas have changed over the years, and to do this, we are hoping to record people's memories of the marine environment from across the Welsh coast. So far, the team have heard from ex-fishermen, holiday makers, wildlife wardens, divers, and locals whose families have lived on the Welsh coast for generations – we are very much hoping you could be next!

Dr Sarah Perry, Living Seas Manager for WTSWW, says *"We're particularly interested to hear about **marine megafauna**: people's encounters with **marine wildlife** such as **dolphins, whales or sharks**, for example, as well as memories relating to **seabirds or fishing**".*

We know our seas are changing, but data of this kind can help to push back historical baselines, learn more about our past. The importance of sharing stories, especially those passed down the generations, cannot be overstated, because, unlike data already in archives, people's stories are constantly at risk of being forgotten.

If you have a marine memory, a photo or postcard that transports you to the past; if you are happy to share your, or your family members', stories, then the team are very excited to listen. Email: livingseas@welshwildlife.org, Call: 01545 560224, or share your marine memory via the project website at: <https://livingseas.wales/share-your-sea-stories-with-us/submit-your-sea-story/>.

For more information about the Living Seas Wales Project, please visit: <https://livingseas.wales/>.

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.

DIED OF STARVATION

In 1839, the Chartist orator Henry Vincent was imprisoned as a result of 'incendiary' speeches he had made in Gwent. After spending some months in Monmouth gaol he was transferred briefly to London and then to Oakham in Rutland. One of his letters from Rutland gaol, now held by the People's history Museum in Manchester, contains the following extract:

There are some who are glad to find a home in gaol. A poor fellow named Hewitt died here on Sunday morning ... He was an illegitimate child, brought up in a workhouse, apprenticed to the button-making trade in Sheffield; the trade being destroyed from a variety of causes, when his apprenticeship terminated, he could get no work. He wandered about, a hopeless outcast, no friendly hand to help him on, and all chance of labour hopeless. At length he got a job with a horse dealer, and accompanied him to Monmouthshire, where he was abandoned by his employer without money. He went to the Monmouth Union workhouse; he was "charitably" taken in on a Saturday, his hair cropped like a thief, and turned out on the Monday at noon. In a starving condition he wandered he knew not whither. Accident brought him to Oakham. He was maddened by hunger and despair. He went to a draper's shop and stole a gown piece, and took it direct to a constable and asked him to take him to gaol. The constable took him to the shopkeeper, who refused to prosecute and he was not sent to gaol. His despair and hunger increasing, he immediately went to a silversmith's shop, thrust his hand through a pane of glass and stole two or three plated spoons. He was apprehended immediately and committed to our gaol, tried ... and sentenced to 6 months imprisonment. He was a sad picture of misery. From his cradle he had wanted food. His legs and arms were as thin as broom sticks. He declared that he plundered with the hope of finding a home in gaol. He had not been in long before his legs swelled enormously. Every attention was paid to him. He had the best of medical advice, and was treated in the kindest possible manner by the good governor and his domestics, but starvation had destroyed our brother. He died on Sunday morning, was buried yesterday. The coroner's inquest sat. I know not their verdict, but I presume it was "died of starvation" This broken hearted victim of our Glorious System now mixes his dust with the worms of Oakham Churchyard. And this ... is the sad fate of thousands upon thousands, only they are more miserable than Hewitt in their own hovels, garrets and other holes, where he, poor young man (he was only 20) found friends to minister to his dying wants in a gaol!