GWENT COUNTY HISTORY ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER AUTUMN 2021

GETTING BACK TO THE NEW NORMAL

As we write (late October 2021), life continues to "open up" after several waves of the Covid 19 pandemic, although case numbers remain high. It has been a very difficult time for our affiliated societies. Some have not been able to meet at all, while others have kept going through the use of meeting streamed over the internet. A number of societies have begun to meet face to face, while others are waiting until after Christmas to see how the situation develops. In the meantime, in the hope that normal face to face meetings will be possible by the spring and summer of next year, the committee is planning the AGM/Annual lecture and Day School (held jointly with the Monmouthshire Antiquarian Association) for 2022. (See 'Dates for Your Diary.') These will be the first to be held since 2019. Plans for 2020 had been well underway when we were hit by "lockdown". Fingers crossed for better luck this time.

AN UNEDUCATED MAN?

In out last newsletter we included a snippet about the essay by Thomas Watkins on the history of Llanfoist, which a Monmouthshire Merlin reporter described as "a dry subject, but by the genius of this uneducated man made a most interesting read."

We have been informed by Eifion Lloyd Davies from Blaenau Gwent Heritage Forum that his bardic name was Eiddil Ifor and he entered many an essay into eisteddfodau. He moved to live in Blaenavon and kept a pub or possibly a beer house there. Some of his essays have been translated into English and are referenced on the Blaenau Gwent Forum website, https://blaenau-gwent-heritage-forum.co.uk/. One essay concerns the various iron works of Gwent, written at a time when they were all working.

USK CASTLE

Some time ago Rosie and Henry Humphreys, the owners of Usk Castle, reluctantly decided to close the Castle to the public after some 50 years of open access following a spate of misbehaviour and criminal damage. However, access is still available to members of Usk Castle Friends. If any of your members are interested in joining, full details are available on their website: http://www.uskcastlefriends.org.uk/

PETER MCKIM B.E.M.

We are saddened to hear of the death in May of GCHA member Peter McKIm. A Llanwern steelworker, he was chair of the trade union committee at the plant during the period of privatisation and became national president of his trade union, the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation. He was described by The Times as A "straight talking trade unionist". In 1984 he was awarded the British Empire Medal. He was also a Newport councillor and in 2001 served as deputy mayor.

2022 DATES FOR YOUR DIARY 2022

N.B. These dates and details are provisional. More details will be given in our next mailing.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING AND LECTURE
Saturday 21st May 2.30 at Torfaen Museum, Pontypool Park.

JOINT GCHA/MAA DAY SCHOOL
Hosted by Oxford House Industrial Archaeological Society. Saturday 2nd July 10.00-4.00 at Oxford House, Risca.

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.

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

REALLY?

The late medieval Llanthony Secunda Manor House at Caldicot has been advertised as a holiday let at an average rate of £650 per night as "King Henry VIII's holiday home".

This startling claim is made on the spurious grounds that it once belonged to the crown. There is no evidence that Henry VIII or any other king ever visited the site. Somebody seems to have lost their head when composing this advert.

There are a number of myths about the history of our county which are not supported by evidence or which have been proved to be untrue. If you have a favourite one, please share it with us.

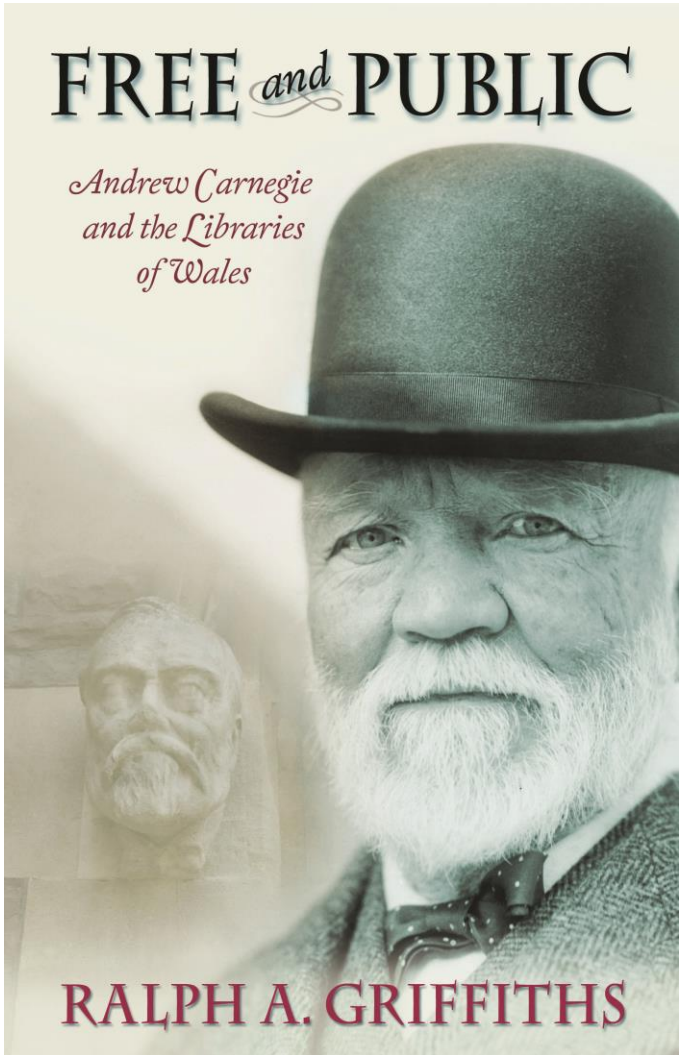
TOO MUCH SPORT?

The summer of 2021 was a particularly busy one for sport on television with, amongst others, the 'Euros' in soccer and 'The Hundred' in cricket taking up a great deal of screen time. Those of you who think this was all too much, might appreciate the remarks made by Professor Wertheimer, Dean of the Faculty of Engineering at the University of Bristol, made at a prize giving ceremony at Newport School of Art, Science and Technology in 1910, as reported in the *South Wales Weekly Argus* (22 December 1910):

"He was afraid that sport enticed a little too much into the life of England (sic) and he thought it was a special misfortune that people were prone to watch football matches instead of playing the game."

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.



Professor Ralph Griffiths, General Editor of the five volume Gwent County History has detailed the story of the Carnegie libraries in Wales in his new book *Free and Public: Andrew Carnegie and the Libraries of Wales* (University of Wales Press £11.99). The book explains the social, cultural and architectural significance of the 35 Carnegie libraries built in Wales before the First World War. They include four in Gwent; Abergavenny, Brynmawr, Pontypool and Rogerstone. It also looks more widely at the free public library system in Britain which came into being following the Public Libraries Act 1850.

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 for only £10 a year? Send us their name and address and we will send them a complimentary back issue of the journal with an invitation to join.