GWENT COUNTY HISTORY ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER SUMMER 2026

ROMAN ROAD, CLAY PIPES AND SNIFFER DOGS: A SNAPSHOT OF PROGRESS AT PLAS GUNTER MANSION ABERGAVENNY

Since the award of £3.3 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), activity has been hectic. The main task has been to obtain match funding of over £600,000 of the match funding. Without this, the money from the HLF cannot be released....and some of the money promised from grants had to be spent by the end of March, before the HLF funding was released! That needed a delicate balancing act. Planning approval was received and CADW only required minor alterations.

The tenants that were on the ground floor left and that area was stripped out, revealing, amongst other details, old flagstones in the cross passage from front to back. More of the plaster ceiling in the first-floor parlour fell off with vibration from traffic (despite the supporting framework) but the good news is that the repairs by the plaster expert look amazingly good.

Limited excavations at the rear found footings of walls (and lots of clay pipes), but fortunately also showed that the Roman Road found previously in other areas was not in this area needed for the foundations of the rear extension for the facilities, lift and stairs. The garden rear area was enclosed with a secure fence and gates to prevent any further fly-tipping. The polytunnel was erected to provide a home for growing plants until the soil can be disturbed – currently any soil must be checked by the sniffer dogs for Japanese Knotweed. The arrangements for access and parking for the tenants in the adjoining properties were finalised. Further archaeological excavations will start soon, and arrangements will be made for hard hat visits –have a look at the website to keep up to date: https://www.plasguntermansion.org.uk

ADVANCE NOTICE GCHA AGM AND ANNUAL LECTURE

This year's AGM will be held at Torfaen Museum, Pontypool, on Saturday 10th October.

Arrive 2.15 for 2.30: tea/coffee served on arrival.
2.30: Annual lecture: " 'Sunday with the Shops Open:' the 1926 General Strike in Gwent" by Peter Strong.

The AGM will follow immediately after the lecture.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

BLAENAU GWENT HERITAGE DAY

Saturday 17th October 10.00am – 4.00pm
Fee: £20 (includes buffet lunch}
VENUE: Llanhilleth Miners' Institute
Programme
Llanhilleth Miners' Institute – Video presentation
Bedwellty House, Tredegar – Talk: Bec Howarth
Castell Taliorum, Llanhilleth – Talk: Graham Eyre-Morgan
St Illtyds Church – Video presentation
Blaenavon, World Heritage Site – Talk: Dr. Peter Wakelin
Copperopolis, Swansea – Talk: Richard Davies

ANNUAL CHARTIST CONVENTION

Saturday 7th November 10.00-4.00.
Mercure, Upper Dock Street, Newport NP20 1DW.

GCHA SUBSCRIPTIONS

Subscriptions (£15 individuals, £20 societies etc) are normally payable from 1st April, although a few members choose to pay in January. If you think you may have overlooked to pay last April, please check with us.

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

FULL STEAM AHEAD IN MAGOR

The villages of Maor and Undy recently united to become Monmouthshire's newest town: Magor with Undy. Funding is in place for building a new railway station at Magor, following the closure of the original one in the 1960s. As this report from the *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 26th September 1851, shows, what goes around comes around.

"The South Wales Railway Company opened the line from Chepstow to Gloucester on Friday last. It was decided that from that day trains should call at Magor, a place of some importance and great rural beauty. A neat station was accordingly erected. The place was most tastefully decorated with the choicest flowers, plucked by the hand of the fair sex. A merry peal of bells from Magor Church was repeated at different periods of the day. In no place in the county (excepting Newport) are fairs and markets better attended than they are in the village (now growing into a town) of Magor.

YOUNG GWENT POETS

In 1969 Monmouthshire Education Committee published a book, *There's Rosemary*, containing poems written by the county's schoolchildren. While some are very serious, showing a preoccupation with the threat of war, others give amusing portraits of their own communities. The following is an example of the latter:

BLACKWOOD
By Philip Angus
Blackwood Secondary School

Chaston's sell us motor cars
And Brimble's sell us tools
And Baber's sell us furniture
And Goodwin's sell us wools.

Merrett's sell us cakes and bread
And Price's sell it too,
While Woodley's sell us sausages
And Turner's sell us shoes.

FOR YOUR BOOKSHELF

Waging War and Building Peace: Mobilising Industry in Wales 1934-1947

By Leon Gooberman (UWP 2025 pp. 296)

Although rearmament initially had a limited impact on the Welsh economy, the war itself brought radical change as the economy became state led. New factories employed thousands of people, agriculture was modernised and metal manufacturing thrived, although coal remained mired in crisis. After the war, lessons learnt were applied to peacetime planning, with the state retaining a dominant role.

Radical Printer: Samuel Etheridge of Newport 1778-1852 by David Osmond

Samuel Etheridge was many things: printer, writer, radical campaigner and Chartist amongst them. He was a friend and mentor to John Frost, and he played a significant part in Newport life for more than forty years following his arrival in the town in 1810, tumultuous years which saw the borough grow into a major seaport as a result of the booming iron and coal industries of the Monmouthshire valleys. This book tells the story of Etheridge's life against the background of the rapid development of his adopted home. 150 pages, 18 colour illustrations, 3 maps. Price £12.00 (including UK p+p) from www.sixpointscardiff.com

