

Abergavenny Local History Society



St. John's, Abergavenny

NEWSLETTER NO. 2

AUGUST, 1986

Once again our newsletter reflects the variety of activities within our Society. The winter lectures are given to capacity audiences, and the scale of the summer visits almost qualifies our visits' secretary for membership of ABTA!

If any members have not yet seen the dramatic effect of the floodlit castle against the night sky, I would urge you to take an evening stroll to see what our fund-raising has achieved - and you can have it floodlit for a mere £3.00 to mark your birthday.

The committee formed to encourage the study of local history in schools has gathered a mass of information on castles in the area. A booklet, together with maps, plans and slides will soon be ready to help teachers explain the history of these wonderful castles.

The Society's association with the museum has always been close, so Martin Buckridge's article on recent acquisitions by the museum is very welcome. Equally welcome is Mr. Fleet's contribution. No better illustration could be found of our members' keen interest in local history and enquiring approach to it. It is this enthusiasm which prompts such admiring comments from our lecturers and guides.

Having handed a bouquet to our members, may your editor, in return, have lots of articles, however brief, from you all, for our next newsletter? Although this has been an annual publication so far, the newsletter will be published more frequently if enough material is forthcoming.

LECTURES, 1986 - 1987

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| September 18th | Arthur Peplow, of the South Glamorgan Institute for Higher Education will lecture on the BAYEUX TAPESTRY |
| October, 16th | Michael Costen, Department of Extra-mural Studies, University of Bristol. A new lecturer for us, and he will talk on DOMESDAY BOOK RECONSIDERED. |
| November, 20th | Rev. David Tipper, of Ross on Wye, will lecture on STONE AND STEAM IN THE BLACK MOUNTAINS. |
| December 18th | Members' Social Evening (admission by ticket only). |
| January 15th | John Petts, now of Abergavenny, will lecture on PAINTING IN COLOURED LIGHT - THE ART OF STAINED GLASS. Mr. Pett's studio is the Old Workhouse Studio, Union Road, Abergavenny. |
| February 19th | Mrs. Christie Arno, of the Mediaeval Field Study Centre, Newland, Gloucestershire is another new lecturer for us, and will talk on HEREFORDSHIRE SCULPTORS AND THEIR PATRONS. |
| March 19th | John Perkins, Head of Extra-mural Studies, University College, Cardiff - another new friend for us, will lecture on THE BUILDING STONES OF CARDIFF. |
| April 16th | John van Laun, Court House, Longtown, will talk on INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGY- THE SUBLIME AND THE PICTURESQUE. Of course, Mr. van Laun has visited us several times before. |
| May 21st | A.G.M. After the A.G.M. we hope to show slides of local castles. |

OFFICERS

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| Chairman | Mr. Gwyn Jones, 6 Belmont Crescent, Tel. 2505 |
| Treasurer | Mrs. Freda Key, 105 Chapel Road, Tel. 2512 |
| Secretary | Mr. Alan Spink, 74 Brecon Road, Tel. 4101 |

SUMMER VISITS

"Why do we have to book so early" is a question I am often asked. The simple answer is, as with booking a package holiday abroad, if you want to visit a particular place, stay at a certain hotel, and at a time which suits you, you have to book early.

The sub-committee meets early in October to draw up a possible programme of visits for the following summer. It takes about 2 months for the possibilities to be examined and to carry out the detailed planning of the selected visits.

To give you a couple of examples of why we start so early, by October, 1985 two of the Polytechnics we approached, those at Chichester and Portsmouth, were already fully booked for 1986, and one of them for 1987 as well.

On our visit to Canterbury I tried in the October to book a tour of the Cathedral on the Friday afternoon, but by then they were already fully booked, and we had to go first thing on the Saturday morning.

The booking forms are typed and photocopied for issuing prior to the January meeting, so that members may have a little while to consider them prior to the final booking date of 1st February.

Again we need numbers and deposits early as some Universities, in view of the increasing demands for accommodation from organisations such as SAGA, ask for deposits up to 6 months in advance.

The most unfortunate aspect of our summer visits is having to disappoint members because of overbooking. Depending on the size of the place we visit, the number of guides available, and of course the numbers wishing to go, we can occasionally take 2 coaches, but normally only one coach is possible.

The Chairman and I have the unhappy task on the 1st February of trying to pour a quart into a pint pot. Various methods have been considered, such as giving preference to long term members over newer members, giving consideration to those who come to all our winter lectures over those who seldom come, and so on, but we finally decided that the simplest and fairest way was to ballot each visit separately.

Committee members exclude themselves from one visit, and we also leave out those members only booking for one visit, other than that everyone has an equal chance. We also try not to disappoint anyone by eliminating them from more than one visit, but unfortunately this year a few people have had to be eliminated from two visits.

For one reason or another, members do have to cancel, so we are able to take some people from the waiting lists, and few in the end are disappointed. We hope you are enjoying the visits we have arranged, and if you have any suggestions for 1987, particularly for local visits, please let us know.

A QUESTION ANSWERED?

Members will remember the visit to Manorbier Church last September. There were various suggestions made, all uncomplimentary to the builder, as to why the Nave and Chancel were out of line. I have recently learnt that this was done occasionally when the design of the church was based, not on the Cross, but on the figure of Christ on the Cross.

Arthur Fleet

The picture of Christ on the Cross, accompanying the information given above shows Christ's head falling slightly to one side, illustrating this theory.

Life in the Workhouse to life in the Big House - recollections by Mrs. Elsie Jones, as told to Mrs. K. Duncan.

Mrs. Elsie Jones was born in 1897 in Hereford. As her mother, aged 17 was unable to look after her, she was sent to Hereford Workhouse, until she was six. She then transferred to a girls' home in Tupsley. The home had stone floors throughout downstairs - there were neither carpets nor rugs. The only furniture consisted of trestle tables and benches. Surprisingly, the home had a bathroom and two lavatories, although the bathroom floor was made, rather uncomfortably, of wooden slats.

The bedroom held five or six beds, but no other furniture. At night, day clothes were folded and placed at the bottom of the bed. The girls rose at 6.30 am. then made their beds and tidied the room. Breakfast consisted of an enamel mug half filled with bread and topped up with boiling milk. Sometimes they were allowed an extra slice of dry bread.

After breakfast they peeled the potatoes for that days dinner, blacked their lace-up boots, washed down the tables - no tablecloths were ever used, and then walked to school. At week-ends, all the tables and benches were scrubbed by the girls and the bedrooms swept. Dinner was usually cold meat and boiled potatoes. On Mondays they had pea soup, but nothing else. Every Wednesday hot beef was provided, which the young Elsie Jones did not like. If she didn't eat it, she met it again at tea-time, this time cold and congealed. On special occasions there was a plain suet pudding. Tea was either one slice of bread and dripping or a slice of seed cake. The girls were allowed half a mug of tea, but nothing more was provided until the next day's breakfast.

When she was twelve, Elsie spent several days in the Workhouse infirmary, being treated not only for the head lice which had made sores on her head, but also for malnutrition.

Clothes were provided by the authorities. They wore calico combinations, a liberty bodice and a petticoat consisting of a calico top and a flannel skirt. Attached to this was another skirt made of knitted strips. This was worn all through the winter without being washed. Over their frocks they wore calico pinafores. Each girl had a number and this was worked in cross stitch on the back of the pinafore. The girls were always referred to by number, never by name.

When Elsie was sixteen she was sent to the now demolished Coldbrook House, on the outskirts of Abergavenny, to work as a kitchen maid. Her duties consisted of washing the dishes, cleaning the copper pans with vinegar and silver sand and helping to prepare the vegetables. She also had to make the toast at the kitchen range, and she ironed the daily papers before folding them lengthwise and arranging them on the table in the hall upstairs.

On one occasion the French cook gave Elsie a chicken to prepare, but as she had never seen one without feathers before, she had no idea what to do with it.

The Herbert's house at Henley on Thames was always opened for the regatta, when members of the royal family were often entertained there. Elsie was responsible for laying the tables for the dinners and banquets, and it was she who arranged the table flowers, folded the napkins and floated violets in the finger bowls.

Entertaining large parties for hunting at Coldbrook meant extra work for the staff. After hunting the men returned to the house for a cooked tea then went to bed for an hour before dinner. As a result, the maids had to remake all the beds.

NEWS FROM ABERGAVENNY MUSEUM

The Cristofa ladies fashion shop run by Mrs. Salter in Monk Street held its closing down sale in January after more than 25 years. Mrs. Salter who is retiring, generously donated part of her remaining stock and shop equipment to the museum. This included several dresses from the 1920's and 1930's, two models, an old draw till and quite an unusual embosser. Other recent acquisitions included one of the old gas lamps recently taken down from the market hall, a Welsh bible with full colour illustrations, and a signed engraving of Crawshaw Bailey. The latter, dated 1876, came together with its original stamped addressed wrapping. In connection with Crawshaw Bailey, museum staff had the opportunity to go up inside the town hall tower when it was recently inspected. Both the town clock mechanism and the three bells had clearly identifiable names and dates. On the clock is cast the name of the manufacturer "Gillet & Bland Croydon 1871", but the three bells are marked "To the Town of Abergavenny Crawshaw Bailey Esq.", followed by the manufacturers name and the date "J. Taylor & Co. Founders, Loughborough 1872".

CASTLE FLOODLIGHTING - SPONSORS

May 17th - 23rd	Mr. & Mrs. Dodd, Llanellen
May 31st - June 6th	Mr. & Mrs. Parsons, Goytre
June 7th - June 13th	Miss. G. Hutton, Llanfoist
June 14th - June 20th	Abergavenny Borough Band
June 21st - June 27th	Mr. & Mrs. Hull, Western Road
June 28th - July 4th	Mr. & Mrs. K.A. Key
July 5th - July 11th	Mrs. M. White, Avenue Road
July 12th - July 18th	Mr. & Mrs. N. Jefferies, Belmont Crescent
July 19th - July 25th	Mrs. Lees
July 26th - August 1st	Kings Arms
August 2nd - August 8th	Dr. R. Morgan, Alexandra Road
August 9th - August 15th	Oestringen Twinning Organisation
August 16th - October 24th	Abergavenny Borough Council

If you would like to floodlight Abergavenny Castle to celebrate a birthday a wedding or any other anniversary, please contact the Chairman, Mr. Gwyn Jones, Abergavenny 2505. The cost is £3.00 per week.

PHOTOGRAPHY COMPETITION

Two competitions will be held, one for the best three colour slides and the other for the best three colour prints. The subject material is to have an historical theme or be connected with the activities of the Society, not necessarily taken this year. All entries will be considered, be they serious, topical or amusing and judged on their photographic content, composition and skill displayed by the person taking the pictures. The closing date for entries will be the October, 1986 meeting

PRIZES

Slides	1st - £10.00	2nd - £5.00	3rd - £2.00
Prints	1st - £10.00	2nd - £5.00	3rd - £2.00

The above prizes will be awarded for groups of three pictures in each category, judged by a panel, to be appointed by the Society's committee whose decision will be final. Entries are to be clearly marked with name, address and subject title.

A selection of slides and prints, together with the winning groups will be shown at future meetings.

All material submitted will be returned but no responsibility can be accepted.