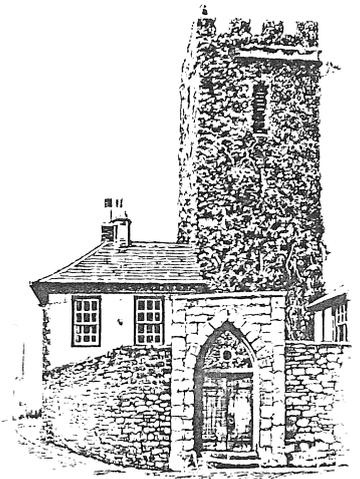


Abergavenny Local History Society

NEWSLETTER NO 5
August 1989



St. John's, Abergavenny

FREDA KEY - a tribute.

With the sudden death of Freda Key in April, our Society lost much more than its highly efficient and conscientious treasurer.

When the committee that had established the local museum transferred it into the safe keeping of the Local Authority, it was left without a function. It was largely Freda's initiative that converted that committee into our Local History Society. From the beginning her commitment was total and she was proud of our growing membership and all that we achieved.

Her standards were always high and the amount of effort she so readily gave was an example to us all. She was involved in almost every sub-committee. Shortly before her death she spent complete days with husband Ken at the Newport Reference Library looking for material on our local priory church.

Next year the Society is organising a Schools Competition to mark 900 years of Abergavenny's history. As a tribute to her enthusiasm for this and other similar projects we have decided to call it the Freda Key Award.

Gwyn Jones

FREDA, in addition to her public duties, was a wonderful wife and mother who loved us, cared for us and managed us and it will be impossible to fill the gap she has left in my family.

We often took great pleasure in the way membership of the Society had changed so many peoples' lives, widened their interests and brought them so many new friends.

If she could only see the way members have helped and supported me in my grief she would say with me that this is something much greater than just a Local History Society. I am proud and thankful to be one of its members.

Ken Key

CASTLE FLOODLIGHTING

There may be some special occasion such as a birthday or wedding anniversary on which you would like to sponsor the floodlighting of Abergavenny Castle. Dates are available from January 1st 1990 and it will cost you £3.50 for a week. You should contact Gwyneth Hutton at 5 Briardene, Llanfoist. Tel 4507 or at Society meetings. The castle has been floodlit every night since 1985 and only this year have we needed to spend money to make the lights vandalproof.

St MARY'S CHURCH STEWARDS

Members of the Society act as stewards on Wednesday afternoons so that the church may be open to visitors between 2 p.m. and 4 p.m. Stewards are not expected to act as guides, merely to see that visitors do no damage. However, there is a lot written about the church and volunteers can read during the quiet moments and could become quite knowledgeable. See Ken Key, 105 Chapel Road, Tel.2512 if you would like to be put on the rota.

CASTLE GARDEN

Members of the Society care for the garden below the museum under the direction of Arthur Hinshellwood. If, unlike me, you can tell weeds from flowers, I am sure Arthur would appreciate helpers.

THE St APOLLONIA WINDOW

Freda, following her letter to the Toronto Star, received a great many letters from Canada. The Toronto Star put its reporter on the job and found Mr Morgan, the owner of the window. It would appear that the window is not as old as it was thought. Its yellow glass probably dates it from 1350 to 1500, the blue border is probably 19th century and the leaf at the top is not part of the original panel. Martyn Buckridge our museum curator is making further investigations.

St MARY'S PRIORY STUDY GROUP

Some of our members have been reading through the items in a rapidly expanding bibliography under the chairmanship of Malcolm Wills-Wood. The loss of Freda, our information retrieval expert, was a bitter blow but work is continuing. In the vast amount of literature there is surprisingly little about the priory although many other fascinating things have been revealed.

THE CLOSE ROLLS

In our research into St Mary's Priory we have been interested to see how centralised was the government in early mediaeval times. The king would receive messages as he travelled about the country and would answer them on the spot by writing a letter, rolling it up and sealing it as a 'Close Roll'. He had no duplicator and he expected the recipient would do his bidding and send the roll back to him. Unfortunately, many recipients felt the king should go and boil his head and tore up the rolls so that important public records are lost. The king did not delegate and attended to things which nowadays a junior civil servant would handle. On September 18 1334 Edward III wrote "John de Malmesbury, parson of Lanwaynarth church, diocese of Llandaff acknowledges that he owes to Nicholas de Stratton, citizen and rope-maker of London, 200 marks; to be levied, in default of payment, of his lands and chattels and ecclesiastical goods."

THE ANGLO SAXON CHRONICLE (from St Mary's Study Group)

King Alfred in the first flower of his youth was desirous that his heart should stand firm in God's ordinances, but yet he perceived that he was not free from the lusts of the flesh, so,-----he prayed that almighty God would in his mercy strengthen his mind in the love of his service by means of some infirmity which he might be able to bear,---but that he might not thereby be rendered unworthy and unfit for his worldly duties. He entreated this very often with great earnestness, and in a short time afterwards he was, by God's permission, afflicted with the piles.

COMPUTERISATION OF MEMBERS' LIST

It is proposed to make a list on disc of members' names, addresses and telephone numbers which are at present held on a cumbersome card file. However, before we can do this we must comply with the requirements of the Data Protection Act. We are an "Unincorporated Members' Club" and are exempt from the whole of the act and the hefty registration fee provided we comply with two conditions.

Firstly we must ask all members through this newsletter whether they object to their data being on computer file and we must also ask all new members if they object before they join. If anyone does object then this negates the whole point of the exercise, namely to make the administration of the Society easier for its officers.

Secondly we must not disclose your data to anyone without your permission.

You will appreciate that the treasurer will have the list at the table to deal with subscriptions at the meeting and there would be little to stop people looking over her shoulder but we would not let anyone other than officers of the society or its sub committees or group organisers have access to the list of members.

This is what we would put on file about you:-

- 1) Your name address and telephone number.
- 2) The name and address of the person, for example wife or husband, with whom you would share a single copy of a publication, for example, this newsletter.
- 3) The date you paid your subscription.
- 4) The visits you had booked and the amount you had paid to go on these visits.
- 5) An area code so that we can print newsletter labels in batches for delivery by hand.
- 6) A code indicating membership of committees, sub-committees and groups such as those for the St Mary's Research or Stewarding so that we can distribute minutes and rotas etc.
- 7) The dates on which you have booked floodlighting and what you have paid.

The transfer of the list to the computer is no mean task and we give notice that if no one objects we would start at the beginning of August to be ready for the first meeting in September.

CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

It has been easy this year for your new editor to find sufficient material for this newsletter. I hope this will be the case in future years. I actually have some material in hand but I will depend on your contributions for next issue.

Ken Key.

SUMMER VISITS 1988

With hindsight it was probably a mistake to arrange our visit to Plymouth at the same time as Her Majesty the Queen, because we certainly suffered the "Queen's" weather! There seemed to be as much water pouring down on our party as was falling over the large waterwheel at the Wheal Martyn Museum. However, we did manage to get a glimpse of Her Majesty before beginning our tour of Plymouth. Fortunately the mists lifted and the rain stopped later on the Saturday and this enabled us to enjoy the splendour of Cornwall's largest house, Lanhydrock and its beautiful gardens. The quaint house, A la Ronde, near Exmouth has been featured on several television programmes, most recently during the latest series of the programme on channel 4, Treasure Hunt. Rain also interfered with our visit with Mr Peplow to Weobly and had us all dashing for cover, but it did not spoil our very interesting guided tours of Abbey Dore church and Clifford Castle. We were much luckier with the weather on our first and last visits. At Castell Coch and Caerphilly Castle in May, a guide from CADW added to our enjoyment of these two so very different castles. Our last visit to Stokesay Castle and Berrington Hall was again to two very interesting and contrasting buildings. The highlight for most members was the visit we made to Treago. We were made so very welcome by Sir Humphrey Mynors and his brother who showed us round what was so obviously their family home, but which was at the same time a treasure house which they were only too happy to share with us. Let's hope the visits during 1989 prove as interesting, and we hope for better luck with the weather.

Alan Spink

EXCERPTS FROM "A HISTORY OF GWENT"

by Raymond Howell who lectured to our Society last winter.

An anti Welsh joke

Henry VII was 28 years old when he took the throne. Half of his life had been spent in continental exile while the other half had been spent in Wales. Many Welshmen followed him to court where they were rewarded with a variety of offices. In fact, the Welsh influence in London was so pervasive that it produced an envious reaction.

Among the 'Welsh jokes' current in London was the suggestion that St. Peter had become so tired of the growing number of Welshmen in heaven that he devised a plan. He arranged for someone to shout caws pob - toasted cheese - outside the heavenly gates; he then slammed them shut as the Welsh rushed out for their national treat.

The Jones tribe

As Henry VII lay on his death bed in 1509, he is reported to have charged his son to 'have special care for the benefit of his own nation and countrymen, the Welshmen'. In the main Henry VIII ignored the injunction and even attempted to discourage the language and to impose English surnames. Where the Welsh surnames were considered impossible to spell and too difficult to Anglicise they were all recorded as Jones.

A STORY FROM MEDIEVAL ART
by Rosemary Peplow



Here we look at the church's long struggle against the survival of pagan rites such as tree worship, evidence of which can be traced in many churches today.

The rites of tree worshippers fell into two groups, in the first the tree itself was regarded as a shrine of divinity. In the second a youth or maiden was clothed and masked with foliage and was led through the fields to ensure the fertility of the crops.

These rites survived in medieval England, the first as a dance round the maypole, the second as the Jack-in-the-Green or Green Man. The pagan origin of the dance was perhaps too clearly remembered and no reference to a maypole can be found in medieval church carving.

However the church had to satisfy the desire of its converts and did allow the foliate mask to become one of the few recurrent themes in a great variety of designs, which the medieval artist employed on capitals and corbels. The sinister beauty of some of these foliate masks, carry our imaginations back through time, to the period when these pagan rites were practiced.

In this carving from Kilpeck church in Herefordshire we can see an excellent example of such a mask with stylised foliage issuing from its mouth.

Monmouthshire, Wales

A final aspect of the Act of Union is of considerable interest. Circuits for judicial organisation were established to cover units consisting of three shires. In South Wales for example, Glamorganshire, Breconshire and Radnorshire were grouped together. Because it did not fit easily into the three-shire system and because it was the nearest part of Wales to London, Monmouthshire was placed under the courts of Westminster. The judicial arrangement was no more than an administrative convenience. In every other sense Monmouthshire was a Welsh county.

MEMBERS PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITION 1989

There will be two categories, one for the best three colour slides and one for the best three prints. The subject material is to have an historical theme or be connected with the Society's activities, 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 photographer. Multiple entries will be accepted but prizes will be limited to one per member per category.

PRIZES

Slides	1st - £15	2nd - £10	3rd - £5
Prints	1st - £15	2nd - £10	3rd - £5

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 names, addresses and subject title and be submitted on or before the October 19th meeting.

The Society will return all material but cannot accept responsibility.

It has been the custom to award prizes and exhibit a selection of entries at the Christmas dinner on 21 December.

LECTURES 1989 - 90

21st Sept	-	Mr Arthur Peplow	-	The Albigensian Crusade
19th Oct	-	Dr Raymond Howell	-	1090 Abergavenny and the Welsh Frontier
16th Nov	-	Mr Leslie James	-	The Chartist Rising 1839
7th Dec	-	NEW DATE	-	Christmas Dinner & Social Evening
1990				
18th Jan	-	Mr Chris Barber	-	Hando's Gwent Vol 2
15th Feb	-	Mr Terence McCarthy	-	Railways in South East Wales past and Present.
15th Mar	-	Mr John Van Laun	-	A Bit of Class at Every Corner
19th Apr	-	Miss Phillipa Hodgkiss	-	Digging up Aviation History
17th May	-	The Thirteenth Annual General Meeting		
		Mr Martin Buckridge	-	Abergavenny Museum 30 years on.