

ABERGAVENNY LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY



Skirrid Fawr & Pen-y-Fal
from Pen Cerrig Calc

**NEWSLETTER No 13
AUGUST 1997**

We were again fortunate to have Arthur Peplow as our guide on the three day visit to Romsey. Our first stop was at Nether Wallop church to look at the 900 year old frescos which had been uncovered. After lunch, Arthur took us around Salisbury Cathedral followed by a visit to Breamore House, an Elizabethan manor house built in 1583 with a Saxon church nearby.

The Minster at Wimborne was our first stop next morning. The twin towered church has about every style of architecture from Norman to late Gothic. There was time for a look at Corfe Castle, which was besieged in the Civil War and partially demolished, before stopping at Moreton church. The church has magnificent engraved windows by Laurence Whistler and in the cemetery is the grave of Lawrence of Arabia who was killed nearby in 1935.

Our final visit of the day was to Athelhampton, one of the finest mediaeval houses in England.

On the way back to the hotel we passed through Tolpuddle, the home of the Tolpuddle Martyrs. Here in 1834 six farm labourers met to propose the formation of a trade union. They were arrested and sentenced to seven years transportation to Australia. They were pardoned two years later and offered a passage home.

After breakfast on the last day we walked to Romsey Abbey, founded in the tenth century, before going on to Beaulieu The home of Lord Montague. We enjoyed its Palace House, Motor Museum, abbey and gardens.

Our Summer Visits programme had begun in May in West Wales at Laugharne where, after visiting the local castle, we went to see Dylan Thomas' s home, The Boathouse.

After lunch we crossed the Preseli hills to see Cilgerran Castle which was begun in 1220.

Mr Eastham, the restorer, showed us around the monument conservation work in St Mary's Church on our first evening visit and on our second we had a very interesting guided walk around Ross-on-Wye.

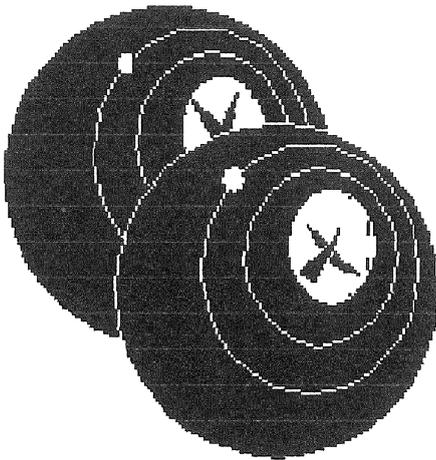
A short coach breakdown did not spoil our visits to two beautiful houses. The first, Kingston Bagpuize House built in the time of Charles II was shown to us by the owners. Highclere House, the second one we visited, is owned by the Earl of Caernarfon. It was the 5th earl who helped to discover the tomb of Tutankhamun and the house contained a display of some of the early finds, some of which were found hidden in the house after over 60 years.

Our last visit was to Upton-on-Severn. Their Civic Society, whom we had entertained in Abergavenny some years before, invited us to visit them. We were shown around this lovely town and were entertained to tea.

Alan Spink.

PROGRAMME

<u>1997</u>	<u>1998</u>
Thurs. Prof John Davies 25 th Sept BREAK UP OF THE GREAT ESTATES IN WALES	Thurs Mr Frank Olding 22 nd Jan NORTH GWENT FOLKLORE
Thurs. Mr Richard Keen 23 rd Oct. WALES-A PERSONAL VIEW	Thurs Mr David Whitehead 26 th Feb. PICTURESQUE LANDSCAPING IN WALES AND THE BORDER
Thurs. Mr Andrew Helme 27 th Nov THE STONES THEMSELVES Restoration and preservation of ancient buildings.	Thurs. Mr Arthur Peplow 26 th Mar. WOMEN IN MEDIAEVAL ART
Thurs. MEMBERS CHRISTMAS DINNER 18 th Dec. at The Lamb and Flag Hotel Abergavenny. 7 for 7.30 p.m.	Thurs. Mr Gwyn Evans 23 rd April THE TONYPANDY RIOTS
The society meets at the Borough Theatre at 7.30.p.m.	Thurs. The 21 st Annual General Meeting 28 th May. Followed by Mr Frank Olding THE WELSH TRADITION OF ABERGAVENNY
	Members subscriptions due after the A.G.M.



Everyone is familiar with the story of Sir Francis Drake who insisted on finishing his game of bowls before taking on the Spanish Armada, but, I wonder how many people realise that in Abergavenny we have the oldest bowling club in South Wales-if not in the whole country.

Abergavenny Bowling Club, or The Little Skirrid Club as it was known locally, began in the year 1860. The green was at the rear of the Great Western Hotel. It was founded by local traders and businessmen with the assistance and goodwill of the hotel landlord, and on Thursday afternoons it was the custom for members first to enjoy a friendly game and then to adjourn to the hotel to eat, drink and make merry.

There were few organised competitive matches in those days, but when a game was played, the club was known as The Abergavenny Bowling club - the name it bears today.

In 1910 the Marquis of Abergavenny made land available for the extension and improvement of the Cricket Club and was prevailed upon to make additional ground available for a new bowling green. This was to benefit those people who wished to take part in sport but did not wish to play either cricket or tennis plus, of course, those already converted to the art of bowling. When the new green was completed the one at the rear of the Great Western Hotel was closed, and the club officially moved to Avenue Road and was reconstituted as The Abergavenny Bowling Club.

After two world wars and the ups and downs which all clubs undergo, the bowling club still continues and now shares its facilities with The Nevill Ladies Bowls Club.

Over the years Abergavenny Bowling Club has produced many fine bowlers who have represented both County and Country, besides providing healthy exercise and enjoyment for hundreds of others.

How nice it would be if, in the year 2060, a member of Abergavenny Local History Society was to turn to the back page of the Chronicle and see that Abergavenny Bowling Club had played a match on the previous weekend - and won handsomely!

This could, of course, only happen if both clubs are well supported in the intervening years.

So! Anyone interested in keeping history alive and the bowls rolling should amble along to the green in Avenue Road . It is a beautiful setting and well worth a visit.

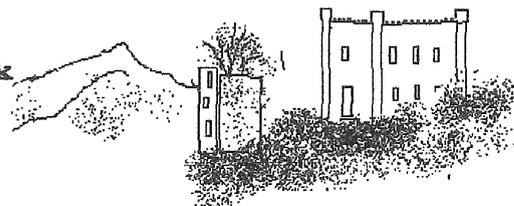
T.J.Coope.

FLOODLIGHTING

Floodlight the castle for £4 per week

Kathleen Spink will be taking orders for 1998 after the September meeting

You can book an individual week or you can book the same week every year for an anniversary



Our journey to this year's summer party at Tretower Court and Gliffaes takes us along the A40 towards Brecon - one of the most picturesque journeys in an area of outstanding beauty.

An added pleasure is the number of sites of interest along that route. In the hills and narrow valleys, especially to the north of Abergavenny, modern roads usually follow ancient pathways so that close by we find much evidence of man's occupation from Neolithic through Iron Age to the Roman and Norman periods.

The following list of some of those sites and simple map might encourage you to take a closer look when you are next in the area.

The O/S Abergavenny & Black Mountains map, sheet 161, provides clearer detail than I have provided and leads you beyond my map to the delights of Bwch and Talybont etc.

1. Llanwenarth Church

Take a left turn at the garage soon after passing Nevill Hall Hospital along what may well have been the line of the earliest main road to the West and led also to the River Usk ferry crossing. It is claimed that a church has existed on this site since 600 A.D. and that the font is pre-Norman; the present building dates from 1631.

The church is normally closed outside service time but a key may be obtained from Church Cottage nearby.

2. The Usk Ferry Crossing.

Near a stile on the bend of the road just to the north of the church, a notice points you to the ferry, 0.4 km. A short path leads you to the riverbank where, until recently, a post, part of the rope ferry gear, still stood. The ferry closed as recently as 1951; the landing ramp on the far side is still visible.

3. Glangrwyne

Park your car in The Bell car park if you are a customer, or on the main road if you don't like pleasant hostelries. Cross the busy main road with care and take the signposted tarmac public footpath, keeping the cricket pitch on your left. It is a most pleasant walk to Llangenny and, further on, to Llanbedr.

4. Cwrt y gollen standing stone.

This Bronze Age stone is set back amongst trees on the left of the main entrance to the army camp. There are a number of these standing stones, probably route or territory markers, in the area but this is by far the most impressive.

It is not being over cautious to suggest an approach from the Crickhowell direction and parking alongside the small army museum building well away from speeding cars reacting to the calming restrictions at Crickhowell and Glangrwyne

5. Crickhowell Castle

Take the last left turning before you enter Crickhowell from the south and park alongside the Danycastell Presbyterian church; the gateway approach takes you into the castle.

Built first as a motte and bailey castle in the 12th century by the Turbervilles, the later stone castle was reported to have been left in ruins by Owain Glyndŵr and became totally uninhabitable by the mid 16th century. On the tower alongside the boundary of the proudly restored cricket ground is an excellent reconstruction plaque of the castle in its prime. Take the trouble to climb the castle mound; from it you gain a superb view of the delightful town and of the original settlement, the Crug Hywel Iron Age camp, high above the town to the north east from which the town takes its name.

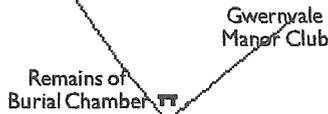
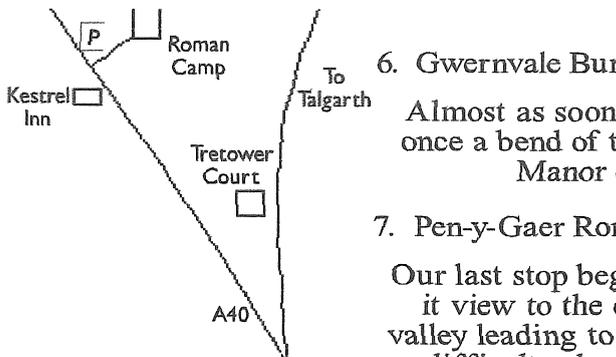
Afterwards, take the car on and to the right and park in the busy shopping area of Crickhowell. From outside Lloyds Bank look north; the view of the market hall, memorial cross, The Bear and Crug Hwyl beyond makes one envy the artist or photographer who can capture the scene permanently.

6. Gwernvale Burial Chamber

Almost as soon as you leave Crickhowell to the north is a lay-by which was once a bend of the old A40 road. On the left hand side of the entrance to the Manor club are the remains of a megalithic burial chamber

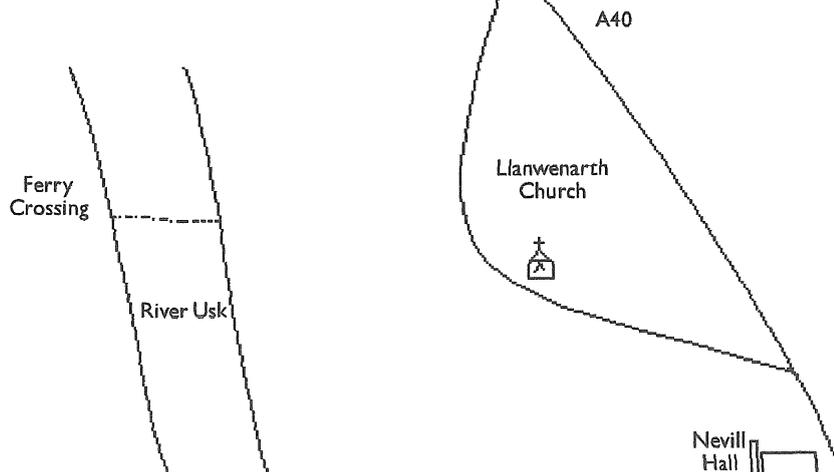
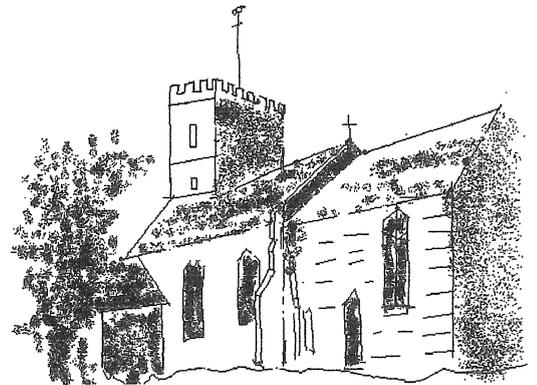
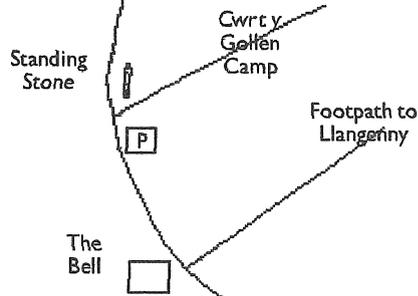
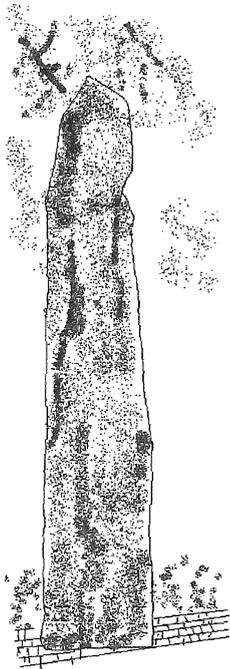
7. Pen-y-Gaer Roman Fort

Our last stop begins in the lay-by on the right just past the Kestrel inn. From it view to the east the pre Norman settlement of Cwmdru in the beautiful valley leading to Talgarth. Now return towards Abergavenny and turn left at a difficult splayed road exit opposite the inn leading to the site of a Roman Camp about halfway between Abergavenny and Brecon.



It is worth carrying the O/S map of this area to pick out and perhaps follow the Roman Road pattern.

Gwyn Jones



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CIDER MAKING IN GWENT

Cider making is first recorded in Herefordshire in the 14th century and it is likely that it spread to the neighbouring areas of Wales at about the same time. The earliest use of the Welsh word seidr is also dated to the 14th century.

By the 16th and 17th centuries cider making was well established in Monmouthshire. In 1679 the probate inventory of the worldly goods of Joseph Hayles of Abergavenny includes a cider press and cider stored in his cellar.

In the 18th century there was a thriving trade exporting cider from Chepstow to Bristol. In 1786 the poet Edward Davies wrote:

'No better cider can the world supply
Than grows along thy borders, gentle Wye;
Delicious, strong, and exquisitely fine,
With all the friendly properties of wine.

By 1813 it could be reported that

'There are orchards in all the vale parts of the
county, and some farmers make more cider in plentiful
years than their forefathers consume.'

By 1878 some 3,954 acres were given over to cider orchards in the county as a whole. Even in the hill districts where cider apples could not be grown, farmers made cider with apples bought in from their lowland neighbours. Cider drinking extended over an even wider area which stretched as far as Brecon, Rhaeadr and Montgomeryshire.

Having said all this, cider making in Gwent was almost entirely a domestic affair. Farmers produced just enough for their own needs through the year, and what trade there was took place with neighbouring farms or local public houses.

Farmhouse cider was very dry, completely still and very thirst-quenching - exactly what was required by people involved in hard physical labour! It was safer to drink than unreliable water in a period when outbreaks of cholera and typhoid were still common. It was also stronger than most beer of its day!

CIDER APPLES

The cider apples grown in Gwent included two local varieties known as 'Perthyr' (after the hamlet of Perth-hir) and 'Monmouthshire Greens'. Other popular varieties included the 'Redstreak', 'Kingston Black', 'Sheep Snout' and 'Foxwhelp'. One variety, the 'White Norman', was notoriously difficult to harvest and so earned the popular nickname of 'the Bastard Norman'!

The apples begin to fall in September, and those that had not fallen were shaken off the tree using an apple hook or 'panking pole'. They were then collected into heaps and left in the corner of the orchard until required or until they were ready for crushing - when they were soft enough for the thumb to be pushed into them.

MILLING

Several methods were employed to crush the apples. By far the most common method was the stone cider mill. A circular structure some seven feet in diameter, the base supported a circular stone trough or 'chase'. An upright 'runner' - similar to a large millstone and weighing up to seven hundredweight - was attached to a central pivot and powered by horse. The earliest example in Wales is dated 1770 and comes from Craig-y-Bwla farm near Crickhowell. Another excellent example survives at Pant y Goetre farm near Llanfair Cilgedyn.

Cider millstones or runners were usually made from a coarse quartz conglomerate of Old Red Sandstone obtained either from the Blorenge or from the Penallt Quarries in the Wye valley.

PRESSING

The next stage in the cider-making process was pressing - squeezing the pomace to extract the juice. At one time heavy oak

cider presses were employed for this purpose, but during the 19th century these were gradually replaced by lighter presses with iron fittings.

Because pomace is runny it has to be held in place to be pressed. In the west of England this was done by mixing it with alternate layers of straw. In Gwent, farmers preferred to use 'hairs'- large coarse mats made from horse hair - which held the pomace in position whilst allowing the juice to run out. The hair was placed on the base of the press and pomace spread evenly over it. The sides of the hair were then folded over the top to form an envelope and the next hair placed on top. Several hairs were built up in this way to form a 'cheese'. A flat board or 'shooter' was placed on top and the press beam was slowly screwed down.

The apple juice was collected in a shallow tub or trough known as a 'cooler' placed at the base of the press. It was then transferred into casks to ferment. Second hand rum casks were particularly prized because of the flavour imparted to the cider.

FERMENTATION

Fermentation began after two or three days and impurities were expelled in the form of a brown scum which gathered around the bung hole. When this turned white and the cider stopped bubbling, fermentation was almost complete. Once fermentation ended, the bung hole was sealed to make it airtight - in some parts of Gwent this was done with a mixture of chaff, clay and cow-dung! The cider was ready for drinking after about three months and could be stored for up to five years.

CIDER DRINKING

Cider was the staple drink of the agricultural population of Gwent and was given as part payment for labouring in the fields. Farmers who produced poor cider or who were mean with their supply often had difficulty in attracting anyone to work for them!

The usual daily allowance for a farm morker in Wales seems to have been between two and four quarts a day. Labourers carried their cider to the fields in costrels which held about half a gallon. These were filled in the morning and then refilled after lunch. Sometimes each person had his own horn cup, but at harvest time one cup would be passed from person to person 'with the sun' (i.e. in a clockwise direction).

Drunkenness and fights were not uncommon and the harvest sometimes had to be suspended to ensure the safety of all concerned!

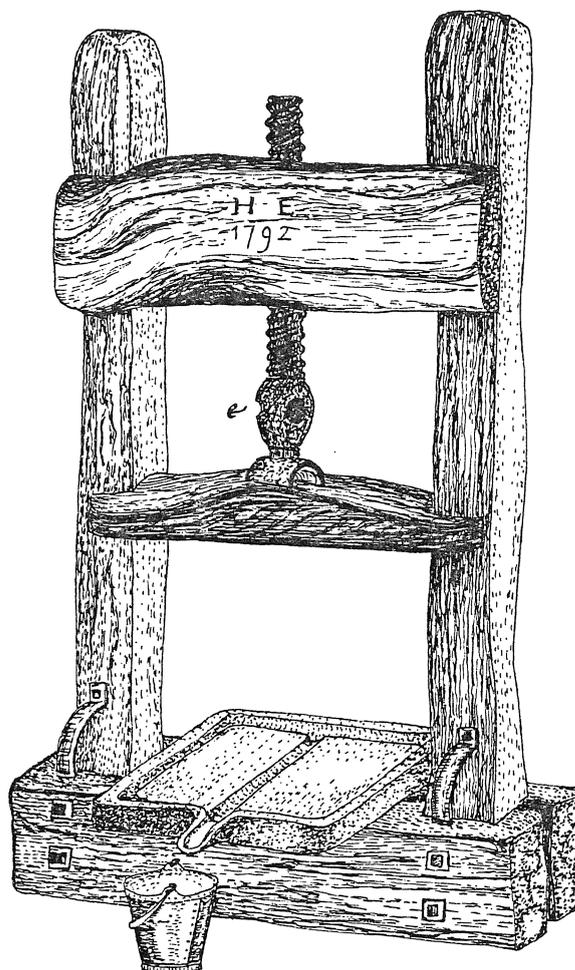
It was usual to offer a glass of cider to any visitor who called at the farm - some farmers kept barrels of particularly sour cider for tramps or other unwelcome guests!

Frank Olding.

THANKS

I hope you like the new format of the newsletter. I have taught myself a great deal about my new computer in the course of editing it and thanks to your contributions I have not had to write it. KEEP IT UP!

Ken Key



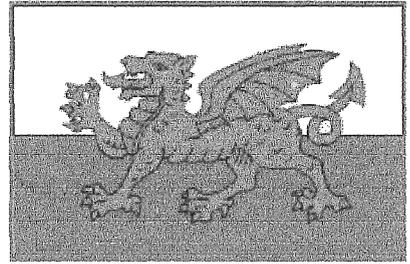
HELP!

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Unfortunately Bill Gates doesn't know about Wales and putting a circumflex above a \hat{w} is impossible without a pen. Any ideas?

I am also told that he provides flags of all countries except Wales. My nephew found a magnificent red dragon on the Internet which, unfortunately I cannot reproduce here in colour.

Ken Key.



MORE HELP



**More stewards are required-
to watch St Mary's church
on Wednesday afternoons**

**Volunteers please to
Ken Key**

TRIBUTE

At the last A.G.M. we reluctantly allowed Gwyn Jones to relinquish the chair.

Gwyn has led a happy band of workers and started and encouraged our many projects since he founded our Society in 1977. We have grown from small beginnings to a strong society of some 200 members, and regular meeting attendance of more than 100.

This is in no small measure due to the warm welcome which Gwyn and Beryl have extended to Speakers, new members and indeed anyone who appears lost or friendless. We are very grateful to Gwyn for making our Society much more than just a Local History Society. Fortunately Gwyn is not leaving us and we shall enjoy his friendship and call upon his wisdom in the future.

Ken Key.

MORE TRIBUTE

When I say I'd like to give a very big THANK YOU to Alan and Kath Spink I'm sure I speak for all the members who have been on the outings and week-ends away for all the work they have done on our behalf.

For seventeen years now Alan and Kath have organised week-ends and outings for the Society, which have always been so ably arranged and so well timed - everything running so smoothly. All so well synchronised to meeting guides, getting on and off buses; Alan allowing longer as the years have passed!

I remember Kath once quite casually remarking she'd written 60 letters - and this was only part of the work entailed. All the groundwork and planning they've done, and arranging the guides must have taken up much of their time. May they continue to focus on our days out for a long time to come.

I'm sure we've all missed our few days away this year. I know I have.

A very big THANK YOU Alan and Kath for all the superb work you've done for us and for the Society.

Anne Griffith.