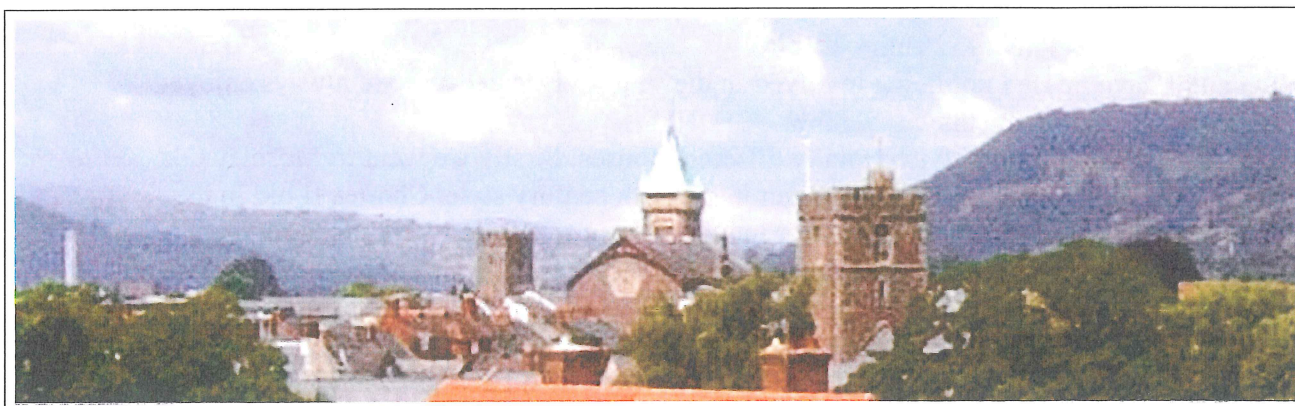


ABERGAVENNY LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY



NEWSLETTER No 19



AUGUST 2003

SUMMER VISITS 2002

Sadly, this is the last time I shall be reporting on the previous year's summer visits. After arranging them for 23 years I felt it was time to step down.

During those 23 years we visited well over 200 different places including cathedrals, churches, castles, palaces, large and small houses and gardens ranging from Northumberland to Cornwall and Norfolk to Pembrokeshire.

Kath and I have missed not being involved in the year's visits because we always enjoyed making all the arrangements.

Last year's visits began with two totally different houses. Firstly we went to Moseley Old Hall, an Elizabethan house with its garden in the 17th century style. Charles II hid in the house after the battle of Worcester. After lunch we went to Weston Park, a magnificent stately home built in 1671 and the home of the former Earls of Bradford. One conference of world leaders took place there.

With Arthur Peplow as our guide we first visited Dorchester on Thames to see the abbey church with its Jesse Tree window. Later we went to Stanton Harcourt Manor, a fine example of a very early unfortified manor house. We were lucky the visit was not cancelled as a few days before our visit £250,000 of silver had been stolen in a ram raid.

Kinnersley Castle was the venue for the first of our half day visits. It is a Welsh border castle remodelled in 1580. Our second half day visit was to Rodmarton Manor which contained some beautiful furniture, ironwork, china and needlework. It also had a lovely garden.

Our Three Day Visit took us to Dorset enabling us to visit Stonehenge on the way and Avebury on the way back. In between, we visited Wilton House, the home of the Earls of Pembroke for 450 years, with its fine art collection, Wolfeton House, a fine mediaeval Elizabethan manor house, Portland Castle, one of Henry VIII's finest coastal fortresses where canon and gun firing re-enactments were taking place, and the Swannery at Abbotsbury.

The last visit was to the home of the Spencers at Althorp. There we saw the exhibition celebrating the life of Diana Princess of Wales and the house with its magnificent contents.

By the time you read this the 2003 summer visits will be well under way and we hope you are enjoying them.

Alan Spink.



Our first summer visit of 2003 to Oxford was a great success. Alan Spink was a hard act to follow but John Skinner proudly showed us round his old college and managed not to lose anyone (except his wife Sonia!)



PROGRAMME

2003

Thurs. 18th Sept.	Mr. Trevor Fishlock WILD TRACKS AT HOME AND ABROAD (Ticket only)	Thurs. 26th Feb.	Ms. Victoria Newton-Davies THE NEWPORT SHIP
Thurs. 16th Oct.	Dr. George Nash LIFE AND DEATH IN A MEDIAEVAL PRIORY	Friday 12th Mar.	QUIZ AND SUPPER NIGHT at the Priory Centre
Thurs. 27th Nov.	Mr. Frank Olding THE HERITAGE OF BLAENAU GWENT	Thurs. 18th Mar.	Mr. Arthur Peplow LUDLOW CAPITAL OF THE MARCHES
Thurs. 18th Dec.	MEMBERS CHRISTMAS DINNER at the Lamb & Flag Hotel, Abergavenny 7.00pm for 7.30pm	Thurs. 15th Apr.	Mr. Martin Everett ABERGAVENNY AND THE MONMOUTHSHIRE REGIMENT
		Thurs. 20th May.	27th. ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING followed by Dr. Maddy Gray THE MEDIAEVAL WALL PAINTINGS FROM THE CHURCH OF ST. TEILO TALYBONT

2004

Thurs. 15th Jan.	Prof. Mick Aston THE MAKING OF TIME TEAM (Ticket only)
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THE SOCIETY MEETS AT THE BOROUGH
THEATRE AT 7.30 pm

Note:- The Trevor Fishlock and Mick Aston lectures
require tickets which are free to members and
children and £4 to non members.

MEMBERS SUBSCRIPTIONS ARE DUE AFTER THE
A.G.M.

ABERGAVENTNY 1905

This is the second part of Steve McCombie's article. We published the first part in the 2002 newsletter. He is grateful to the museum and to Mr Evans who donated the directory on which his article is based.

In 1905 Abergavenny was very much a railway town and the then London and North Western Railway Company, at that time the largest railway company in Britain, ran their South Wales operations from the town. I counted 285 heads of household who were clearly in railway service, a few working for the competing Great Western Railway. This would not be the sum total of railway personnel as the offspring, lodgers and working wives are not recorded. To become a locomotive driver you must first have many years as a locomotive fireman. A loco required one of each but the Directory records considerably more drivers (60) than firemen (27) presumably for this reason. For a complete picture try and access the 1901 Census data on the Internet! Other popular railway jobs were Brakesmen (presumably goods train guards 26, Clerks 20, Platelayers 12, and Signalmen 11. Many were conventional jobs prefaced "Railway". There were then three railway stations in Abergavenny (Brecon Road, Monmouth Road and Junction) so we find three Station Masters, plus a Relief Station Master.

Even at this time the railways were still expanding. On 12th July the Duke and Duchess of Beaufort formally opened the line from Brynmawr to Nantyglo. But another form of transport was just beginning to emerge. The Grange in Brecon Road offered petrol, accessories and repairs and an early motor car is illustrated. They were also the makers of the "Famous Powella Cycles and Motor Cycles" and they were progressive in another way -their phone was number 2. It would be a fascinating exercise to compare the numbers engaged in the motor trade today with the numbers then working for the railways. And the numbers now working for the railways probably roughly equals those then selling, repairing and driving motor vehicles (including motor omnibuses). Talking of which we learn that on 1st July 1905 the first motor mail left for Brecon at 4 a.m. arriving about 5.50. At about 6.50 p.m. the night mail car left Brecon arriving at Abergavenny Post Office at 8.50. One imagines there was a long wait at Bwlch to enable the engine to cool down.

One of the most striking things in this directory is the diversity of occupations that existed. Nobody dared to describe themselves as unemployed and in those days there were few pensioners and retired. Some jobs must have been transitory, for instance there were quite a number of hay cutters. What did they do for the rest of the year? Some of the more frequent occurrences are labourers, carpenters, journeymen of various trades, proprietors (of pubs, cafes etc) and attendants at Monmouth Asylum. A lot of people made or repaired things which would now be made in factories. Here are a few occupations mentioned that are no longer available in Abergavenny:- Gas Works Stoker, Organ Grinder, Helve Maker, Blacksmith's Striker, Dyer, Journeyman Bookbinder, Retired Colliery Proprietor, Ironworks Brakesman, Hoop and Hurdle Maker, Steam Laundry Carter, Fish Curer, Lamplighter, Town Crier, Railway Fuel Inspector,

Locomotive Tuber, Emigration Agent, Tripe Merchant and, an interesting dual role, Collier and Borough Bandmaster!

Turning now to the town's traders, one is struck by some familiar names. Shackletons the Chemists were established in both Cross and Frogmore Streets, and Mr Shackleton took some of the photographs in the Directory. There was a Building Material Merchant called Robert Price in Lion Street. J. Straker and Son had established themselves as Auctioneers and Valuers in Market Street Chambers, where they are to this day. In the same trade was one Montague Harris in Lion Street, who was also Vice Captain of the Cricket Club and the team's crack bowler taking 76 wickets in the season for an average of 10.32 runs each. Another firm of estate agents in Frogmore Chambers, Tomkins & Capper, had just become Tomkins & Chadwick. Is this the Chadwick later to merge with Straker? At 32 Monk Street we have R Baker Gabb & J. B. Walford, Solicitors. Mr Baker Gabb was the playing President of the Hockey Club which although only formed in 1897 claimed to be the largest in Wales with 80 members and fielding two teams on Saturdays and one on Thursdays.

Among 13 butchers was H. J. Edwards of 1 Flannel Street and Frank Rawlins (sic) of Market Street. At this time the town had 16 Bakers and Confectioners, 7 Greengrocers and Fruiterers, 6 Hay, Corn and Seed Merchants, 8 Coal and Lime Merchants, 7 Drapers, 15 Tailors and Clothiers and no less than 23 Grocers and Provisions Dealers including, in the High Street, two well known names -Home & Colonial and Liptons. In the light of such numbers it is surprising there are not more empty shops in the town today. However, apart from jewellers there are no mention of gift shops. On the other hand some numbers have changed very little. In 1905 there were 6 Estate Agents and Valuers, 4 Chemists, 5 Ironmongers, 7 Doctors, 17 cafes and other caterers, 8 solicitors, 8 hairdressers (all male), 2 vets and 4 undertakers. However, we no longer have the 2 Blacksmiths, 4 Saddlers, 5 Mineral Water Manufacturers, 4 "Cycle Experts", 1 Laundry, 1 Pawnbroker, 2 Woolstaplers and a Registry Office for Servants!

There was a choice of four banks viz:

The Birmingham & District Banking Company at 57 Frogmore Street -now Barclays

The Capital and Counties Banking Company at 18 Cross Street

Lloyds Banking Company then and now at 54 & 55 Cross Street

The National Provincial Banking Company at 9 & 10 High Street -now the Natwest.

There is no mention of the predecessors of HSBC, alias the Midland Bank, unless this was the former Capital & Counties. Working for a bank must have been a good job in those days. No less than three cashiers and one bank clerk occupied mansions in Windsor Road.

Back in 1905 the uncongenial nature of many homes and lack of in-home entertainment (no radio, TV or Web) coupled with the nature of manual work and uncertainties about the quality of the water supply all made for a good living for brewers and innkeepers. At this time most towns had their own brewery. The present Brewery Yard refers to the former business of J H Facey & Son in Market Street. Another brewery was Edwards & Co at Llanfoist. And we learn that since Thomas Delafield took over the King's Arms in 1862 the business has developed to such an extent as to become "practically a brewery". He offers Pure Ales and Stout from a half pint bottle to a 54 gallon cask. "A trial order is solicited". Delafield, Facey and one Alfred Jenkins are described as Ale and Porter Bottlers and Maltsters. And for the temperate, as already mentioned, there was a choice of five mineral water bottlers. All this production obviously needed outlets and within the town itself there were at least 57 hotels, inns, and beerhouses -down a bit from the figure of 76 in the early 1880s. Most that remain today were trading under the same sign a century ago.

Although the Abergavenny Chronicle gets a mention in a lesser typeface, the Directory seems to plug the "Abergavenny Mail and Farmers' Gazette" 8 pages every Tuesday for one penny. It describes itself as "the leading paper of the district", "bright, crisp and chatty" and "the popular non-political family newspaper". At this time W. H. Smith & Son (late of Brecon Road station) had taken over the business of C J. Fricker, Bookseller & Stationers at 13 Cross Street. They offered three newspaper deliveries a day, had Le Figaro and Le Petit Journal available daily and "all other foreign papers procured regularly as required". One envies the postal arrangements -4, (yes four) deliveries each day except Sundays when there was one at 7 a.m. Separate times for final posting each day to other places are recorded. Foreign mail to "most British Colonies, Possessions and Protectorates is 1d per 1/2 oz. To other parts of the world 2 1/2d per 1/2 oz."

Perhaps most enjoyable of all are the advertisements. Lead advertiser is Baker & Confectioner, Redwoods, who established their hygienic bakery at 4 Flannel Street in 1881 and whose statements top and tail most pages of the Directory. Thus "Once tried, always eaten -Redwood's Vienna Bread"; "Redwood's Bread is unsurpassed -Everybody praises it", "Secretaries and Superintendents of Sunday Schools should write to Redwoods for terms for picnics and parties" etc. etc. Many shops show pictures of their premises. Perhaps most flamboyant are the butchers and poulterers, whose windows are festooned with their wares i.e. carcasses. Here is an analysis:

Derek J Williams 16 Frogmore St phone 44
"Families waited on Daily in Town and Country"
"Pickled Beef & Ox Tongues, Best Ox and Heifer Meat."
31 dead animals on open display

Eastmans 24 Frogmore St Phone 10
"Ox Tongue, Pickled Beef etc. always ready"
53 dead animals on open display

S J Ruther 7 & 8 Frogmore St. Phone 17
Fishmonger, Poulterer, Game Dealer & Fruiterer
137 dead animals on open display

A R Williams 11 Cross St Phone 13
Fish, Poultry, Fruit and Ice.
32 dead animals on open display. These high figures are partly accounted for by poultry and rabbits.

Other interesting advertisers include C R Boundy, General and Furnishing Ironmonger of 22 Frogmore Street, who undertakes Acetylene Gas Installations. He also has an implement store in the Cattle Market supplying Chaff Cutters, Root Pulpers and a large stock of plough fittings. David Cooke in Victoria Street claims there is no better maker of breeches and trousers in South Wales. "Mis-fits are unknown". To ensure you are correctly dressed, and quickly, for the solemn occasion "mourning orders are specially attended to". J. Phillips who combines the trades of cabinet maker, upholsterer and undertaker remakes mattresses and does carding "by patent machine".

Among the hostelrys, the Black Lion Hotel in Lion Street is the H.Q. of Abergavenny Football Club and the Borough Silver Band, both presumably attracted by its "large and well ventilated Assembly Rooms". The Hen and Chickens offers "Every Accommodation for Cyclists" and "Best Quality Meat Only". The Swan Hotel -Family and Commercial -is "most pleasantly situated" At that time it had a large clock on the front of the building and possessed a "Large Banqueting Room for 400 guests". There is no advertisement for the Angel Hotel. They probably felt no need. Another venue announces itself as follows:- "To Sunday Schools, Christian Endeavours, Bands of Hope, Choirs, Cyclists and others. If you wish to make your outing a success visit Abergavenny Castle with its Shady Walks, Swings, Giant Slides, Lawn Tennis Court and Large Banqueting Hall holding about 1000 persons for Games etc. and in wet weather. Has Refreshment Bar, Tea, Coffee and Dining Rooms with every accommodation for parties of any number"!! So was this massive banqueting hall, a building long demolished, within the castle walls?

However, not all visitors to the town came from such virtuous groups. A major furore occurred after the Chamber of Trade had suggested that colliers were not desirable visitors to Abergavenny. On 1st May in response the Town Council passed a motion saying that iron and coal workers were "welcome to seek recreation and amusement here". Next day a public meeting in the Drill Hall, at which it was claimed over a thousand people were present, proposed a motion "Extending to all, irrespective of class, a hearty welcome to the town". This was carried unanimously amidst cheering.

So do I wish to return to the world of 1905? No! For a few with resources it must have been a pretty good life but for the many they must have been difficult days.

S R McCombie