



Abergavenny Local History Society



*John's, Abergavenny*

*It is with a tinge of sadness and nostalgia that we say goodbye to our old logo and welcome the new one designed by Trevor Scott from an original idea by Bob Morgan*

# NEWSLETTER No 20

## AUGUST 2004

[www.abergavennyhistory.co.uk](http://www.abergavennyhistory.co.uk)  
Charity registration number 1098582

## PROGRAMME

## 2004

- Thurs.  
16th Sept. Mr. Tim Hoverd  
THE ARCHAEOLOGY  
OF HEREFORD CITY
- Thurs.  
21st Oct. Mr. Chris Barber  
KILVERT COUNTRY
- Thurs.  
11th Nov. Prof. Mick Aston  
THE MAKING OF TIME TEAM
- Fri.  
17th Dec. MEMBERS CHRISTMAS  
DINNER  
at the Priory Centre, Abergavenny  
7.00pm for 7.30pm
- 

THE SOCIETY MEETS AT THE BOROUGH  
THEATRE AT 7.30pm

SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR YEAR £6 PER  
PERSON PAYABLE BY 1st MAY

CHARITY REGISTRATION  
NUMBER 1098582

THE SOCIETY WEBSITE IS:  
[www.abergavennyhistory.co.uk](http://www.abergavennyhistory.co.uk)

## 2005

- Thurs  
27th Jan. Mr Ray Haydon  
THE BRECKNOCK AND  
ABERGAVENNY CANAL
- Thurs.  
24th Feb. Mr. John Evans  
NATHANIEL WELLS -FROM  
SLAVE TO SHERIFF OF  
MONMOUTHSHIRE
- Fri.  
4th March QUIZ AND SUPPER NIGHT  
.at the Priory Centre, Abergavenny
- Thurs.  
17th March Mr. Arthur Peplow .  
KILPECK AND THE  
HEREFORDSHIRE SCHOOL  
OF STONE SCULPTURE
- Thurs.  
21st April Mr. Keith Underwood  
THE CIVIL WAR IN  
MONMOUTHSHIRE
- Thurs.  
19th May 28th ANNUAL GENERAL  
MEETING:  
Followed by  
Mr. Frank Olding  
IRONWORKS AND TRAM  
ROADS IN BLAENAU GWENT

### BILL AND MARJORIE FARLEY

A tragic fire at their home ended the lives of two of the well loved and respected founder members of the Society.

The Archaeology Group welcomed Bill on the excavation of the 1241-2 mediaeval wall in Nevill Street

Bill was chairman of the first Plaques Committee which investigated the sites, designed the plaques and organised their manufacture and erection.

Committee meetings were often hilarious, being enlivened by some very potent home made wine.

His job of Chief Constable of Monmouthshire did not prevent him from voluntary activities too numerous to list. He was a churchwarden at St. Mary's and he and Marjorie were regular stewards on the Local History churchwatch on Wednesdays. We shall greatly miss this lovely happy couple.



### BRITISH ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETIES AWARD



We congratulate Gwyn Jones on receiving this award at the Imperial War Museum in London presented by Mr Noel Osborne of Phillimore & Co Ltd.

The article on page 4 describes his tremendous role in the formation of the Society.

We also acknowledge the part which Beryl has played in the Society and the support which she has given him.

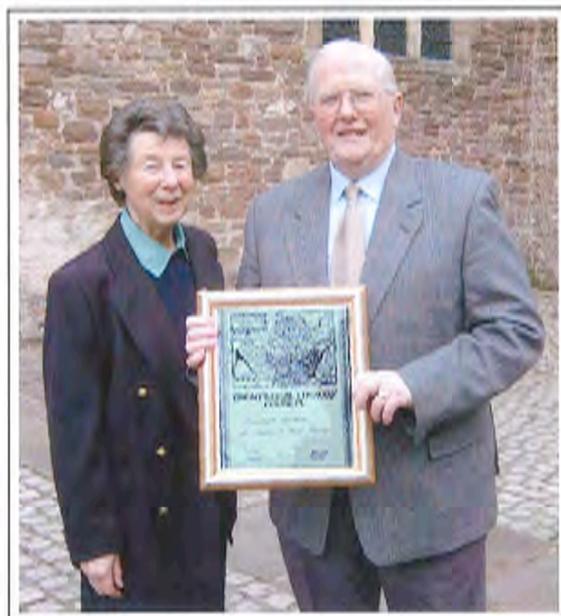
Gwyn is president of the Society

### CHURCH STEWARDS

Gwyn and Beryl Jones raised £159,000 on behalf of the Society to save the monuments in St Mary's Church. Much more has since been raised to make this not only a glorious treasure but also a centre of activity both sacred and secular. Our responsibilities as a Society have not ended. Whether we are religious or not, the mere presence of someone from the Society from 2 pm to 4 pm each Wednesday afternoon leads visitors out of temptation to desecrate or vandalise.

We have three hundred odd members. Surely more than twenty can take on this task. The new Rota starts in September. Please ring Ken Key on 852512 if you can help.

### GWENT LOCAL HISTORY COUNCIL AWARD



We congratulate Alan Spink on receiving this award at the St Mary's Priory Centre.

In his many positions in the Society since its inception, he has worked with enthusiasm and dedication.

Kath has played a great part in the Society and deserves acknowledgement in this award.

Alan is a Life Member of the Society.

## THE BEGINNING by GWYN JONES



My real interest in local history began when I moved from the Rhondda Valley to take up a post in the small King Henry VIII Grammar School in Abergavenny. The school of about 100 pupils and ten staff was a delight.

I soon became aware of the many active organisations in the town's population of around 6000. One of them, led by the brothers Ernest and Alfred Jackson together with Duggan Thacker were with a group of townfolk determined to save the collapsing castle keep and turn it into the town museum. Ernest encouraged me to bring along senior pupils of King Henry VIII School as working parties at the weekend. He became a good friend and repaid my interest by teaching me to drive in his car. He would bring coffee and biscuits for the boys on Sunday mornings and at the end took them on a coach tour followed by a tea in a Ross restaurant.

When the museum opened its doors to the public we became 'Friends of the Museum' but we missed the creative activity. Two of the Friends, Mrs Ruth White and the late Mrs Freda Key suggested that we form a local history society. I became its first chairman



The group photograph shows the committee and spouses celebrating in the castle after receiving the British Association of Local History Societies 'History Society of Britain' award in 1985.



They were the most friendly, hard working and co-operative group of people, thriving on many a social evenings in each other's houses and taking the most enjoyable week-end breaks around England and Wales.



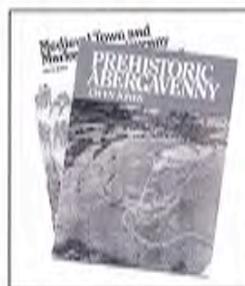
When I received the award for services to local history in the Imperial War Museum in June 2004 I was proud to represent that band of friends. Without them the following list of our activities would have been very much shorter.

We formed an Archaeology Group which first tackled sites around the mediaeval town, discovering the exact site of the Roman fort of Gobannium and then a lengthy excavation of Twyn-y-Gaer, one of the numerous Iron Age forts in the surrounding hills.



The Society initiated the large St Mary's Monuments Restoration Programme and with my wife Beryl's usual support and assistance raised £159,000 which triggered grants from C.A.D.W. and the National Lottery Fund.

Blue plaques set up by the Society mark places of historical interest throughout the town.



The Society produced a book for schools in the county to encourage school visits in Monmouthshire from Neolithic to Industrial era sites. It also sent a pack of notes with slides to all local schools and published books on Prehistoric, Roman and Mediaeval Abergavenny and the Mediaeval Market. Senior history students at the local comprehensive school have received grant aid from the Society.

Its pamphlet 'A Walk around Abergavenny' assists locals and visitors to the town and members provide guided tours of the town for local and visiting organisations.

The Society installed floodlighting of the castle and members celebrating special events

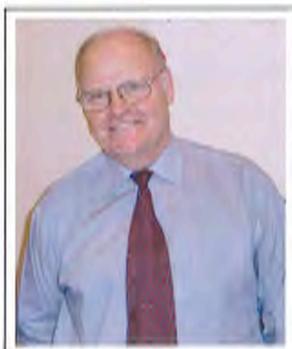


pay for their week to finance running costs.



The program of winter lectures in the Borough Theatre always draws a crowd of over 100.

Summer coach visits to sites from Hadrian's Wall to Portsmouth are very popular.



The Society does not rest on its laurels. Irena Morgan, our Secretary, wrote her book 'Abergavenny Past and Present'. Chairman Richard Davies has introduced numerous fresh projects. These include the Oral History Book of Wartime Abergavenny, a closer link with schools, a video history of Abergavenny and interpretive panels in the castle. Alan Spink and I have been awarded with Life Membership of the Society. We can sit back and admire a much larger membership in the safe hands of an active committee under an excellent chairman.



## KOREA! DO YOU KNOW WHERE THAT IS?

*Some 12 months ago, I had the privilege of recording the memories of some veterans of the Korean War, now living in Abergavenny (Abergavenny Chronicle July 24 2003 and September 18 2003). I was unaware, at the time, that our Visits Organiser, Brigadier John Skinner, was also a veteran of that grim conflict. He was kind enough to supply me with the following account of his experiences as a young officer. Like so many others, he was undergoing his National Service. He was to become a Regular officer and to complete 33 years of service! The title of this article was, in fact, the question asked of him by the Officer Cadet School R.S.M. when he was told that he was to be posted to Korea. He did know, having looked it up in his atlas! He remembers:-*

*I first-footed Korea shortly before my nineteenth birthday - a slim one-pipper, about to be entrusted with the lives of 38 soldiers, many with young wives, children and fiancées anxiously awaiting their return.*

I remember being shocked by the barren wilderness, far removed from my Kentish up-bringing in the Garden of England, by the primitive existence the local people were forced to lead and stoically endured, by the overwhelming silence in the more peaceful parts of the countryside.

Prominent among my memories stands out the 'Initiation Drink' when first invited to the Sergeant's Mess - a dug-in-lean-to may be a way of describing it. The potion, presented in a fire blackened mess tin, "must be downed in one sir," the presiding Sergeant Major persuasively advised and his co-conspirators pressed ever closer. There was no escaping. To have tried would have damned me forever. Having drained the repulsive receptacle of its innocuous contents, there, floating in the few remaining dregs, winked the Sergeant Major's glass eye. As a parachuting prank, he had apparently dived through a flaming oil drum in order to reach terra firma, and a jagged remnant of the cut-away base had "caught one of me blinkers by surprise sir." What was the potion's recipe? Three of the ingredients were, I recall, stove heating fuel, insect repellent and a tot of gin to enhance the potion's taste, but heaven knows what else!

There are so many memories that now afford me pleasure: the weekly freezing dunk within the sawn off bottom half of a gasoline tank; the inadequacy of our clothing; every local person's all-pervading Kimshi-laden breath; to hint at just three.

Of comradeship and loyalty there was an over-flowing abundance and this made making an exceedingly difficult decision far easier. I would forego imminent release from conscription and hope for an early slot at the Regular Commissions Board.

My outward voyage to Korea had taken five and a half weeks by steamship. My return, in January 1955 was by a series of propellor-driven flights, interspersed with engine failure. My late arrival at a foggy Stanstead necessitated a last minute non-motorway race in my father's Morris Minor to the Commissions Board at Westbury. En route I had to ward off a severe chiding for discarding the opportunity of acquiring a place at university. My dear father later visited his ever appreciative eldest son at The Queen's College, Oxford.

*Fifty years on, the North/South Korean conflict has not been finally resolved and the frontier between the two remains as a last outpost of the Cold War. The veterans of what has been referred to as 'The Forgotten War' were duly honoured during 2003, the fiftieth anniversary of Armistice. John Skinner attended one commemoration:-*

To mark last July's 50th anniversary of an Armistice that signally failed to put an end to hostilities, all surviving National Service subalterns who had served in Korea during 1950-53 were invited to a commemorative lunch in London. Hung on one long wall were list upon list of British soldiers and officers who had succumbed to the constant onslaughts launched upon them. The organiser of the well attended lunch, himself a Korean Veteran, welcomed the guests amongst whom were the South Korean Ambassador, General Sir Anthony Farrar-Hockley of the Glorious Glosters and Imjin Battle fame, and not least, the battalion medical officer who had brought the lunch organiser back from the dead.

The South Korean Ambassador responded. Referring to the lists of names he paid tribute to the numerous sacrifices made in the defence of his country. "I was only five years old in 1953," he said. "But for your brave efforts, I might not be standing here today. "He expressed the firm belief that South Korea's tremendous transformation since then, could never have occurred without the heroic and invaluable part played by all armed forces involved in the war there, as well as its aftermath.

David Powell. June 2004

## SUMMER VISITS

By arranging only three full-day and one half-day trips last summer, I cut my teeth, as it were, following Alan Spink's twenty-three years organising our visits prior to my attempt to provide a more ambitious programme for this summer.

In May fifty members spent a splendid afternoon at Tyntesfield, then over eighty of us had a magnificent day with Arthur Peplow touring Malmesbury Abbey, Northleach, Tewkesbury, Deerhurst Monastery and Odda's Chapel - in two coaches!



Earlier this month we made, by popular request, a repeat trip to Oxford. From all reports our party of forty members found visiting several Colleges enjoyable and, dare I say, educative. In June, after being guided around Usk's historic sites by Geoff Mein, a local archaeologist, we had supper together to round off the evening.

The weekend in Kent in late July has attracted fewer members than hoped, possibly because people have already been to the places on offer. Nevertheless, thirty-three will travel to Knole House on the Friday,

stay three nights in a hotel near Maidstone, go to Leeds Castle and Sissinghurst Gardens on the Saturday, be guided around Canterbury on the Sunday and visit Penshurst Place on the way home on the Monday.

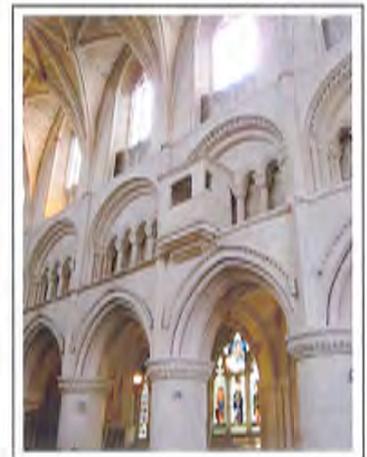
This summer's programme concludes with an August afternoon's tour of churches, villages and towns in neighbouring Herefordshire with Rev. Bill Rutter as our guide.

\* \* \*

As plans for 2005 are being made now, members' suggestions for future visits will be most welcome - those already received are much appreciated. I would also be grateful to hear in advance of your preferences for full-day, half-day, evening or weekend trips and any other comments that will help me to meet your requirements. Members of the National Trust, English Heritage and Cadw pay no entry charge when we visit properties belonging to, or maintained by, these organisations. It is important

to indicate membership on your booking form and to bring your membership card. When the Society gained charity status earlier this year, I asked if the cost of visiting National Trust properties might be reduced and subsequently received a Link Pass, allowing non-members of the National Trust to visit certain of its properties at half price on weekdays - a factor to be borne in my mind when planning the programme. One last request! Please keep the summer visit letters and note the dates of the trips you have booked in your diary. May the sun always shine on us. With best wishes,

John Skinner (01873-853998)



## The Abergavenny Leopard Cup



[Images © National Museums & Galleries of Wales].



On show at the National Museum in Cardiff for the next few weeks as part of the spectacular touring Buried Treasure exhibition is a small bronze Roman cup found on farmland near Abergavenny.

Discovered in 2003, this exquisite cup, measuring about four and a half inches high, has been described as one of the finest Roman vessels to have been found in Wales. Known as the Abergavenny Leopard Cup - the handle is a leopard with silver spots and amber eyes - it has captivated both experts and public alike.

It might not have the immediate impact of some of the treasures such as the magnificent Mildenhall Treasure, but when it was due to be withdrawn under a rota system such was the public outcry that the museum decided to keep the cup on show - though in a different location.

The cup was found by a metal detector enthusiast from Cwmbran who was searching farmland on a site near Abergavenny. He reported it to the Portable Antiquities Scheme and this enabled the site to be investigated by the Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust funded by Monmouthshire Museum Services. Their excavation revealed that the cup had been placed upside down in a small pit containing a cremation and that the handle had become separated. A spokesman described it as "one of the most fabulous finds recorded under the scheme".

The cup has been acquired for the National Museums & Galleries of Wales and has been examined by archaeologists Richard Brewer and Mary Davis. It was the subject of one of the lectures which accompanied the exhibition.

The report by Richard Brewer and Mary Davis says the cup was probably imported from Italy in the first century AD - similar cups have been found at Pompeii which was destroyed after the eruption of Vesuvius in AD79. It could have been handed down through the generations before it was interred in the cremation burial. Both the cup and leopard were made from a leaded bronze. Lead was added to help the molten bronze (principally copper and tin) flow more easily and improve the quality of the casting.

It is not known whether the cup belonged to a member of the Roman army attached to the garrison based at Gobannium, or a native Briton from a nearby civilian settlement. "Whichever is the case, this 1st-century cup was a costly import and probably belonged to someone of status, who cherished it sufficiently to want it buried with them on their death," says the report.

Although Rudyard Kipling may have explained How The Leopard Got Its Spots in his Just So Stories, the mystery of how the Abergavenny Leopard Acquired Its Spots is still a mystery. The well-preserved cup and the leopard handle are of high quality craftsmanship. The silver spots, however, are inlaid in a cruder manner which suggests that they were added on later. Perhaps the leopard started life as a different big cat.

The report says that in Roman mythology, the leopard and other types of large cat, usually appeared as the draught-beast and companion of Bacchus, the god of wine. His worship involved feasting, drinking, music and dancing. "The choice of a leopard for the handle of what might have been a wine cup would, therefore, seem very appropriate. Leopards, captured in both Africa and Asia, were also popular with the Romans for display and fighting in the amphitheatre arena."

**The Buried Treasure: Finding Our Past** exhibition shows historic finds by ordinary people which have turned out to be some of the most spectacular treasures found in Britain. Almost all the finds have been made by chance - by farmers, beachcombers and metal detector users.

It emphasises that not all treasure is made of silver or gold, and aims to encourage people who find artefacts to report them under the Portable Antiquities Scheme so that archaeologists can assess them - and the sites in which they were found - in context.

The touring exhibition is in Cardiff until 5th September - admission is free. It has been staged in partnership with the British Museum, where several artefacts have already been on display and three other major English museums. From October it will go to Manchester, Newcastle-upon-Tyne and then Norwich - but without the Leopard Cup.

There is a chance that the cup may soon return home to Abergavenny - at least for a time. Negotiations are being held so that it can be displayed as the centrepiece of a Roman exhibition at Abergavenny Museum in 2005

Irena Morgan.