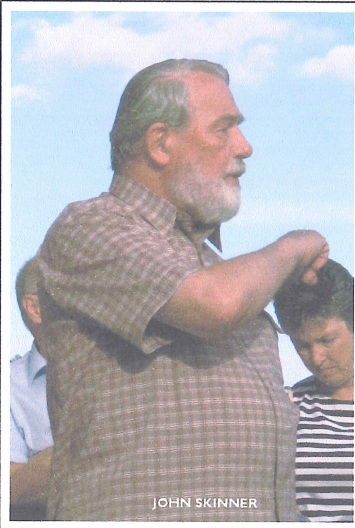


SUMMER VISITS



As last year's newsletter went to press, members were about to embark on a weekend at the admirable Hoole Hall Hotel in historic Chester, via an impressive Chirk Castle. Saturday's tour of Liverpool's Anglican and Catholic Cathedrals proved enthralling, followed by a visit to Speke Hall of black-and-white architecture fame, then a drive past the huge Thelwall Lock on the Manchester Ship Canal. On the way back, we found much of interest at Erddig House: many photos of past staff; lots of old-fashioned farming equipment; not least, three lovely Shire horses.

Rev. Bill Rutter's guided afternoon trip to Much Marcle, Kempley and Garway Churches drew the 2005 programme to a notable close. Perhaps the author of the best-selling "Da Vinci Code" could have made more of Garway's fascinating connection with the Knights Templar.

This summer's programme began with a second visit to Tyntesfield; the demand for places regrettably meant disappointing some members. In view of the limit of 50 visitors per trip and the difficulty with booking a tour of this popular National Trust property, the likelihood of a third visit in the foreseeable future seems remote. An alternative is to book individually (Tel: 01275-858675) and travel to Tyntesfield by car.

I'm sure everyone who toured Dunster Castle, Cleve Abbey and Wells Cathedral with Arthur Peplow appreciated both the scope and the depth of his expertise. Apart from an untimely shower at Dunster, it turned out to be a marvellous day.

April's lecture on Llancaiach Fawr Manor, which David and Barbara Powell arranged, was brought to life most amusingly and poignantly for members when they visited the Manor last month. The afternoon stroll around St Fagan's in the sunshine also emphasised how fortunate we are to have such remarkable links with Welsh heritage within easy reach.

As I write, we have just returned from an excellent town guided walk through historic Abergavenny attended not by visitors but by Society members who finished up with an excellent meal in the Angel Hotel.

By the time you read this, a goodly band of members will have sampled the delights of Warwick Castle, Elton Hall, Ely Cathedral and Burghley House while based at a Peterborough hotel. Then Bill Rutter will conduct a guided tour of Golden Valley churches in mid-August.

John Skinner

Visits Organiser: 01873-853998

FAREWELL SUMMER VISITS

As the 2006 Summer Visits programme winds its way into August via Peterborough and the Golden Valley my job of Treasurer slowly draws to a close. Just fielding those last minute cancellations and refunds, paying the remaining bills and preparing the balance sheet up to the end of December is what is left.

It has been a most pleasurable journey since the summer of 2003, when I first worked alongside John Skinner in getting you to Oxford, Aberglasney, Birtsmorton Court and Weobley amongst other destinations. Since then our first visit to Tyntesfield proved to be mouthwatering and the long weekends in Kent and Chester set the standard.

John has managed to select and book many and varied places to see over the past four years and I hope that he continues in the role of Visits Organiser for many more seasons. On your behalf I should like to thank John for all his efforts.

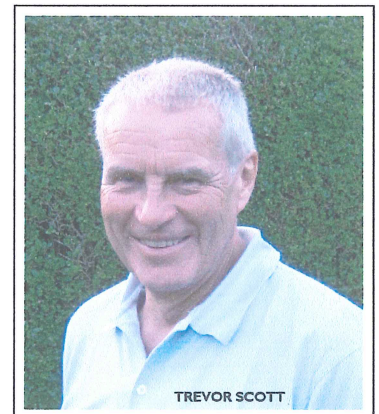
As you may know Rachael Rogers is taking over the role of Visits Treasurer in January 2007 and I will gradually be handing over the reins during the autumn. I wish Rachael well in her new post.

In many ways I am sorry to be losing the immediate contact with the hurly-burly of Summer Visits but it is time to move on. However, I shall be remaining on the History Society committee for at least another year.

Finally, may I take this opportunity to thank all of our 'customers' for being so co-operative in dealing with the paperwork and for paying up on time and also Mr Harry Gilbert for auditing my books.

See you on the coach and don't be late!

Trevor Scott



St MARY'S CHURCH NEEDS YOU

Stewards play a vital role in keeping our historic church open each day. The Local History Society has undertaken this task each Wednesday afternoon for the last twenty years. Inevitably some of us have died or become too old and frail to do it. You do not have to be an expert although you could slowly become one. All you have to do is present a welcoming face to visitors on Wednesday afternoons between 2 pm and 4 pm. on about three occasions each year. If you can help please ring Ken Key on 01873 852512.

HOME FRONT RECALL. 60th ANNIVERSARY VE DAY PROJECT

As part of the 60th Anniversary VE Day celebrations organised by Abergavenny Town Council in 2005, Abergavenny Museum undertook to carry out a project, which would provide a lasting reminder of the event.

It was felt that the museum was well placed to facilitate a project to record the memories of those involved in the war. The VE Day celebrations in Abergavenny were seen to be an ideal opportunity to recruit those interested in contributing to the project.

Abergavenny Museum already had minidisk recorders, enabling oral history recordings to be made. However it was felt that a more interesting way of recording information was through software called Commanet.

Commanet software can be used to scan photographs and objects and link them to written and audio information. Information about a picture/object can be recorded straight onto the computer. A member of the public brings in an object, document or photograph. It is scanned and the picture is indexed. It is possible to group information, automatically, by person, period of history, event etc. Hot spots can be created so names of people appear when the cursor is hovered above the appropriate area. Oral history recordings can be carried out using objects and photographs as prompts, therefore the recording is linked to a variety of visuals.

Contact details of twenty-four people were taken at the VE Day Celebrations. Many of them had photographs, memorabilia and documents that they could lend to the museum for copying, in addition to memories they could share.

Following the purchase of the software, training in how to use it was received by representatives of the museum and Local History Society.

In addition to the software, additional hardware was purchased to ensure that recordings were of a high quality and preserved in the long term. Advice was taken from the National Museum and Galleries of Wales.

Since March 2006 the project has been considerably furthered by the assistance of Amy Jones, who is volunteering at the museum before beginning a Masters Degree in Museum Studies at the University of Leicester.

Amy began her work with us by updating and improving the World War II workshop that we offer to schools. Following the Home Front Recall Event the town council deposited a 'suitcase of history' with the museum. This was full of artefacts relating to the wartime period; in addition there were posters, CDs of music and supporting material. To complement these items the museum also had some child size costumes made, to enable children to dress up as ARP Wardens, Land Army girls, members of the Home Guard and the Women's Voluntary Service. Schools can handle real and replica artefacts, find out about shopping and rationing during the war and listen to a historical re-enactor describing life at this time. We ran the new workshop in May this year for the first time; over 150 children participated and the event was a great success.

Amy is now carrying out further interviews with people. When sufficient material has been gathered, a CD will be produced. This will eventually be available for viewing in Abergavenny Museum Gallery on a gallery computer. In the meantime, material will be available to see by appointment.

If you are interested in taking part please contact the museum and ask to speak to Amy or Rachael. It is of course possible to use the equipment for recording and interpreting other subjects, so if there are other areas you would like to contribute to, please mention them to us.

No 10, THE CIRCLE

The inspiration for the National Health Service

Introduction

Life in Britain for ordinary people in the 1930s and 40s was tough. Every year, thousands died of infectious diseases like pneumonia, meningitis, tuberculosis, diphtheria, and polio. Infant mortality - deaths of children before their first birthday - was around one in 20. If the children survived, they would be lucky to live past 50 years of age. Many women died in childbirth.

By the start of the twentieth century, public health measures had made a big impact on infectious diseases.

The death toll from other infectious diseases had fallen. Despite this, in the first week in August 1905, the British Medical Journal reported that over 1,500 people died from infectious diseases in the principal towns.¹

No 10, The Circle, Tredegar

In Tredegar, a 'Health and Education Fund' was set up around 1871. This became the Tredegar Medical Aid Society around 1890, based at No 10, The Circle, to provide local health services for nearly all the residents in the town. Subscriptions entitled members and their dependants to comprehensive medical, surgical and dental services, *free at the point of care and according to need*. Initially it was run by representatives from the workers and from the management of the Tredegar Iron and Coal companies (which later amalgamated).² Other individuals and businesses could also subscribe.



In 1901, the Society called a meeting to discuss the establishment of a hospital. The workers agreed to an increased subscription to be deducted from their wages, and donations were obtained from local employers and tradespeople, as well as from individuals. Lord Tredegar donated the land for the hospital. Many fund raising activities occurred each year and provided a varied social calendar. A separate committee was set up to build and manage the hospital, although some served on both committees. Aneurin Bevan served on the hospital management committee in 1928, becoming chairman in 1929 to 1930. The Society donated equipment and the Society's doctors attended patients admitted to the hospital.

The Tredegar Medical Aid Society provided the buildings for surgeries, a pharmacy and living accommodation for doctors and their families. One of these doctors was A.J. Cronin, author of the book (and film) 'The Citadel', based on his experiences working in South Wales. Between 1915 and 1948, the Society employed five doctors, two dentists, two dental mechanics, three dispensers and their assistants and a nurse. The Society also paid for chiropody, massage and other paramedical services, as well as rapid referral for consultant treatment. The referral could be outside the area in London, Bath, Cardiff, Newport or Birmingham and transport was provided or paid for. Spectacles, drugs and any appliances were supplied free of charge when required. Education about health matters was emphasised.

The National Insurance Act

This Act in 1911 provided sickness and health insurance for workers who earned less than £160 per year. The Society was registered as a Friendly Society in 1913 and was able to administer the scheme and claim a capitation grant from the Government to cover the medical costs of those who paid their stamp. Many Friendly Societies were not well run.³ Too few subscribers to spread the risk, or too many older members or members working in dangerous occupations, resulted in outgoings exceeding income. Some societies distributed their funds every few years and theft of funds was a frequent problem. Others had their funds raided by employers who, just like today with pension funds, still regarded money contributed as theirs to reclaim when business was poor.

Tredegar Medical Aid Society managed to avoid these traps, partly by the excellent administration and financial prudence of Walter Conway, who served as secretary to the Society for eighteen years. Walter Conway, together with others in the 'Query Club', such as Nye Bevan, opposed the influence of the Tredegar Iron and Coal Company management, and maintained the control by the working-class members. Committee members were elected at an annual general meeting, attended by between 1000 and 1,500 people. This working class involvement helped to avoid the disasters that caused the collapse of so many other Societies.

Aneurin Bevan and the NHS

Nye Bevan was able to draw on the excellent example of the Tredegar Medical Aid Society when he was appointed Minister of Health and brought in the National Health Service in 1948. The structure of the original National Health Service closely resembles the provisions of the Society with care available *free at the point of care and according to need*.⁴ He faced opposition from many, just as the Liberal reforms from 1906 had done. These reforms, made by Lloyd George, had convinced many people that governments should help the poor and needy, but others believed that if the state gave too much help, the poor would become lazy and expect everything to be provided for them. This dilemma continues. There was much opposition to the introduction of a National Health Service from doctors, especially the consultants, who feared loss of income. Nye Bevan had to compromise to allow private treatment in NHS hospitals. He later resigned over the introduction of charges in the NHS for dental care and spectacles and his vision of medical care, free at the point of delivery and financed through taxation, has been whittled away.

Gill Wakley

Sources

1. Moore W. Then and Now. *The Times*. August 6th 2005, from material in the British Medical Journal Archive. February, 1905.
2. www.cradleofnhs.org.uk
3. www.afs.org.uk/research/researchpgrayhistorypage.htm
4. Rivett G. *From Cradle to Grave*. London: King's Fund. 1998.

THE TREDEGAR MEDICAL AID SOCIETY

The future

The Tredegar Medical Aid Society offices were based at 10, The Circle, by the Town Clock, at the symbolic heart of the town. Tredegar Development Trust, set up 10 years ago to help revitalise the town, started a campaign to save the building which had been empty for a number of years and had become dilapidated. The Trust felt the building was of national and international importance.

In April, the Trust completed lengthy negotiations to buy the property from Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council, who had carried out vital structural work to make safe the building. The Trust has now submitted an application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a Project Planning Grant, the first stage towards a full grant. The outcome should be known within three months.

As part of the plan to promote the project, I was commissioned to research and produce a website, www.cradleofnhs.org.uk, similar to the Local History Society's website. I was appointed the project's press, publicity and PR officer and in addition have worked on the application bid.

The campaign has already received widespread support from Gwent Local History Council and politicians of all parties, among many others.

Also as part of the campaign I am currently helping to produce a short film. This film records the Tredegar-born poet Patrick Jones reading his poem, 'Circles of Light'. It also features well-known character Trevor Jones, 'Trevor the Milk', explaining to a group of children how the NHS was founded.

For more information please visit the website www.cradleofnhs.org.uk

Irena Morgan

NEW OFFICERS

It's all change for the three executive officers of the society with Irena Morgan elected as the new Chairwoman, and her husband Stephen Morgan, as Treasurer.

Irena, the former Secretary, has taken over from Richard Davies who has resigned as chairman after six years (Picture page 5) We appreciate very much what Richard has done for us. We will all miss his hard work, enthusiasm and good humour. We wish him well for the future.

The society's last Treasurer, Ronald Courtney Jones, resigned in April due to ill-health, and Steve agreed – with just a little bit of persuasion - to fill the vacancy.



The new Secretary is Mrs Andrea Phillips, a newcomer to the Society, who stepped forward after the Annual General Meeting to volunteer for the vacant post. She is a company secretary for A.P.A.C.Ltd., and with her interests in local and general history, archaeology and the classics will be a most valuable member of the Society

Irena thanked the other retiring committee member, Christine Scott, (Picture page 4) a former Lecture Secretary, and more recently the Social Secretary. "Chris has been an extremely hard working member of the committee for a number of years and will be greatly missed".

Bryn Seabourne was co-opted onto the committee shortly before the annual meeting and the two new committee members are Gail Fitzpatrick and Gill Wakley.

VOLUNTEERS

One of the major factors in the rapid growth of the society – last year we had 426 members – has been the commitment and willingness of committee members to undertake the many tasks needed to ensure the society runs so effectively.

We've been very fortunate to have committee members who are willing to become involved. At the moment we have 18 members but there is still scope for others to volunteer if they wish without being on the committee.

Ken has elsewhere asked for volunteers for 'Churchwatch' and we need more volunteers for the Victorian Garden at Abergavenny Castle.

TOWN WALKS:

The demand for our guided walks around the town centre continues to grow. In addition to the guided walk included in our own summer visits' programme, the Carmarthenshire Antiquarians recently brought 51 visitors to the town for the day. A special thank you again to Sir Trefor Morris and Father Regan who supplemented the town tour on the day by taking the visitors around St Mary's Priory Church and Our Lady and St Michael's RC Church, respectively.

We've already had one volunteer from the society to join our small pool of guides but more would be welcome. There are three stages: The Castle tour; then Castle Street to High Street and the third stage to Tan House (Pegasus Court). At times our resources have been over-stretched and one person has had to cover two of the three stages on one tour.

If you would like to join our team of guides please contact me on 01873 853957.

Irena Morgan

