

THE LAST ABERGAVENNY TO MERTHYR TRAIN JOURNEY

Representatives from our Society attended the Steam Society's successful meeting in January to commemorate this event. The last public service ran on Saturday June 4th 1958. This was the 08.30 a.m. Abergavenny Junction to Merthyr station, hauled by an old GWR pannier tank steam engine, with the down train being the 08.30 a.m. Merthyr to Abergavenny, also drawn by an ageing pannier.

On Sunday 5th June 1958 a special was laid on that summer evening, after dark, steaming uphill from Abergavenny to Merthyr to commemorate the closing of the line, the train driver was Mr G.E.Lewis, his fireman Mr D.Hinton and the train's guard was Mr Hubert James of Abergavenny.

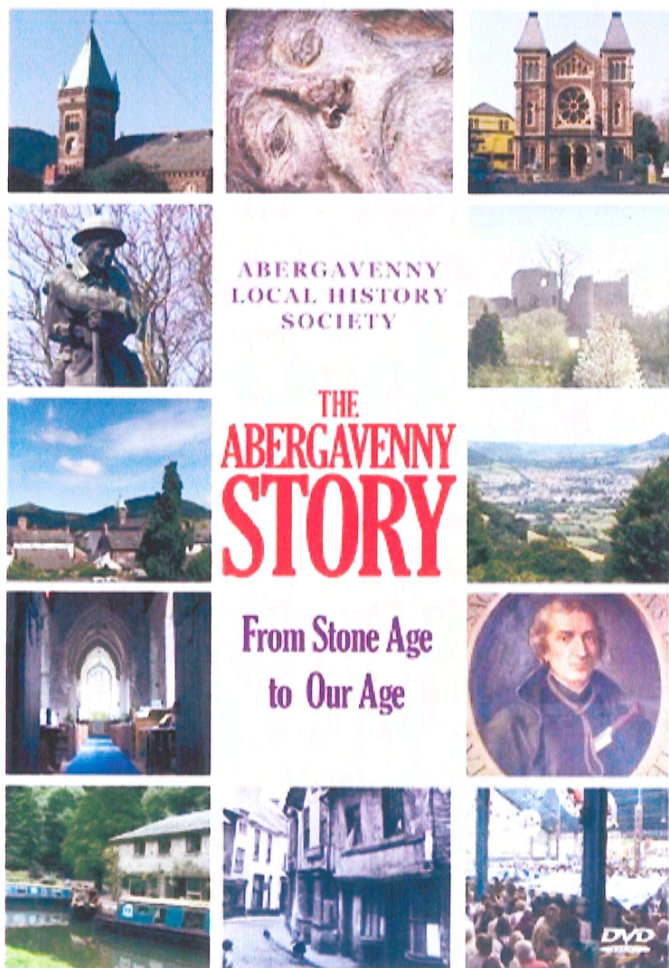
Crowds had gathered at viewpoints at the trackside along the entire route, with large crowds at Brynmawr station. The train then completed the journey to Merthyr and turned around for the return leg complete with whistle-ups at every station on the very last run, householders along the route turning their kitchen and bedroom lights on and off to signal the train's passing and the passing of an era for this particular stretch of line.

It is hoped to make an oral history recording the memories of those involved. Any volunteers for either recording or volunteering their memories should contact Irena Morgan

THE ABERGAVENNY STORY: FROM STONE AGE TO OUR AGE

This DVD has been a long time in gestation but is now ready for publication. It is being shown in Museum on a loop system in the room awaiting display cases – so, if you want a preview, seize the moment! It will be on sale later, complete with an insert map of the places mentioned.

It has been well received by people who have seen it at Abergavenny Museum and there has already been a number of inquirers wanting to buy it.



It has been made by Paul Keenan of PK Productions Ltd who started the project in his spare time while working for an Ebbw Vale film company after we received a £750 grant from Monmouthshire County Council.

The script has been written by a team of nine who each contributed a section and the main script editor was our former Chairman, Richard Davies. Thanks must go to Frank Olding for providing the information on pre-historic and Roman Abergavenny.

The main voice-over has been recorded by Gary Meredith and you may recognise Richard's voice as the other narrator.

Thanks too must go to a number of other people such as Sally Davis, of Abergavenny Museum who provided a number of drawings, the young harpist Eleanor Cotterill, Frances Baines and Michael Blackmore for allowing their work to be used; the video-maker who sent in a clip of a 1970s Abergavenny Carnival, and to the re-enactment companies.

We shall be rolling out the red carpet soon for the film premiere and hope to invite everyone who has helped in any way. The recommended retail price of the film will be £10 and it will be available direct from the society at a discount.

GWENT COUNTY HISTORY VOLUME 2

The latest in the Gwent County History series has been officially launched at Abergavenny. *The Age of the Marcher Lords, c.1070-1536* is the second of five volumes which will all cover the history of the county from Stone Age to modern times.

The second volume, co-edited by Dr Ray Howell (University of Wales, Newport) and Tony Hopkins (Gwent Record Office), deals with the period from the Norman conquest to Tudor times.

Professor Ralph Griffiths, the eminent Welsh historian and general editor of the series, welcomed guests to the launch of the book at St Mary's Priory Centre and said the series aimed to combine the latest research with high academic standards and accessibility. The books would be a framework for future research.

The idea to publish the books was first proposed by Gwent Local History Council who set up the Gwent County History Association to oversee and raise funds for the project after a Lottery bid was turned down.

Both volumes are published by the University of Wales Press. The first, *Gwent in Prehistory and Early History*, was co-edited by Dr Howell and Professor Miranda Aldhouse-Green, and published in 2004. The third in the series will be out next year.



Pictured at the launch are, left to right, Dr Madeleine Gray (University of Wales, Newport), co-editor of the third volume; Nick Ramsay, Welsh Assembly member; Martin Culliford, Chair of Gwent County History Association; Dr Ray Howell; Councillor Paul Jordan, the Deputy Mayor of Abergavenny; and Tony Hopkins.

UPDATE ON FLOODLIGHTING

Over the last few months we have advertised the Castle Floodlighting Scheme in the Tourist Office window, Abergavenny Focus, St. Mary's church magazine, the newsletters of the Baptist and Catholic churches and the notice boards of the Family Church and their Rehoboth Centre, where my grandchildren go to 'Soft Play', to try to bring the scheme to a wider audience. To date the response has been nil.

I should therefore like to try a new approach. Instead of asking you to sponsor the floodlighting for someone you know, could you ask your family to sponsor you. I am sure your grandchildren would be delighted too, as they don't have to think about what to get you for a birthday present, and you don't have to receive another scented candle or pair of socks.

As an added attraction they can organise it themselves by logging on to the society's website (Google Abergavenny Local History Society and download the floodlighting form). They then send me the completed form together with a £5 note or a cheque.

Alternatively they can ring me on 01873 854725

Of course with exam results coming up I am sure you will want to register your delight at their successes, and how better than sponsoring a week's floodlighting.

Paddy Beynon 53 Cresta Road Abergavenny NP7 7AU

NEW PLAQUES

Among our latest projects is a children's plaques scheme to complement our highly regarded Blue Plaque trail in the town centre. Combined with this is a plan for a landmark tribute to Lord and Lady Llanover highlighting the importance of Abergavenny in the history of the National Eisteddfod.

We feel the project would be an ideal way to engage children's interest in the history of our town and nine local schools will be researching the themes of the plaques and the 'Llanover obelisk'. Through grant aid and donations, we have raised nearly all the money and are £500 short of our £7,750 target figure.

We plan to have six, mainly pictorial, children's plaques, five ceramic and one stone, set at a lower height than the Blue Plaques and easily accessible to children and also identifiable through touch to the visually impaired. An added advantage would be that the plaques would be a tourist attraction. We aim to add more plaques in the future.

The plaques would focus on Roman Abergavenny (possibly with the plaque on a stone plinth in the Castle Street car park, part of the site of Gobannium, the Roman fort); the town's first market place in the St John's Square area; a medieval town gate (HSBC bank in High Street); flannel manufacture (side of Boots the Chemist's building in Flannel Street);



periwig bleaching (former British Legion club in Nevill Street), and the first King Henry VIII School at the former St John's Church, now the Freemasons'

lodge. The siting of the plaques on the buildings will depend on the owners' permission

We envisage the Llanover tribute as a monolith depicting the many subjects with which they are associated. These could include the triple harp, a honey-bee, Welsh costume and even London's 'Big Ben' and the clock tower (constructed when Lord Llanover was the Commissioner of Public Works) on one side of the stone.



The standing stone will be sited near the Gorsedd circle in Swan Meadow. We feel this tribute is particularly relevant in view of the fact that the National Eisteddfod could shortly return to Monmouthshire, and could even include Abergavenny itself. If anyone knows where we can source the standing stone we would also be very pleased to hear from you.

We intend to bring out a bilingual leaflet and include information about the Gorsedd stones already at Swan Meadow.

The sub-committee is made up of Schools' Liaison officer, Jane White; Honorary Secretary, Gill Wakley and myself. We have been consulting with Monmouthshire County Council's Conservation Officer. Of the money raised so far, we have received £5,000 from MCC's CEDS scheme; £1,000 from Abergavenny Town Council; £500 from Bryn y Cwm area committee; £500 from our own funds; £30 from Llanover Community Council; and individual donations including Mr Robin Herbert and Mrs Elizabeth Murray, both descendants of Lord and Lady Llanover. Frank Olding has donated his May lecture fee to the scheme and I have donated the fee received from a talk to the Friendship group at the Methodist Chapel.

NEW PLAQUES contd.

Other letters of support are from Cymreigyddion y Fenni, Abergavenny Civic Society, and the Abergavenny Eisteddfod Committee.

Since starting the scheme, it's been suggested that we have a bigger Roman tribute with a 'Roman corner'. This could be sited in the grassed area of the Castle Street car park near the vehicular entrance opposite the Angel Hotel but with a new separate entrance for pedestrians. We are currently discussing this with council officials.

The 'corner' could include a depiction of Roman coins / pottery / a legionnaire / mosaics / and also a plan of the Roman fort, the bath house and workshop, overlaid onto a map of the modern town centre.

This more ambitious project has been very well received but it would mean that we would have to find a lot more money as well as go into partnership with others for future maintenance.

Irena Morgan

ROMAN CAERWENT

Roman Caerwent featured prominently in last season's programme and it seems that the



archaeologists from the popular TV programme *Time Team* share our interest.

Mark Lewis, of the Roman Legionary Museum, Caerleon, gave us a talk in April about the Roman city of Venta Silurum which gave its name to the ancient county of Gwent.

He followed this with a guided tour in May as this year's special event for Chairwoman's Day when we walked the impressive remains of the city's defensive walls, and visited the forum, basilica, shops and houses before enjoying a cream tea at St. Stephen and St Tathan's Parish Church

Then *Time Team*, with Mick Aston, spent three days in Caerwent from Tuesday, June 24th, assisted by volunteers from local archaeology groups. This is their second recent visit to South Wales. Last year, the team carried out excavations at Portskewett in search of King Harold's hunting lodge.

Using the latest in expensive, ground-probing equipment, the team chose three sites at Caerwent to dig a number of trenches within their deadline. On the third day, members of the public, including several society members, were allowed to explore the sites and have a close-up view of what was found.

Among the buildings the archaeologists unearthed were a large villa and on another site what could be shops. The discoveries were described as significant additions to what was known about the Roman settlement. The villa would have had mosaic floors and an outside plunge pool where the wealthy home-owner could relax in a heated pool while surveying the picturesque view.

The 'star' find was a beautiful carved bone penknife with a folding blade depicting two gladiators in combat, another was a long 'needle' with a blunt and sharp end which could have had surgical or industrial use. All the artefacts will be fully assessed, catalogued and exhibited at a local museum.

As a finale to the programme, presented by Tony Robinson, archaeologist Phil Harding donned a toga and became an orator, and although he flashed an ankle he managed to keep his hat on.

The programme will be shown in the next series in early 2009.

Irena Morgan

SUMMER VISITS

By popular demand last year's programme kicked off with a third tour around parts of Oxford University, starting with privileged access to the serene, incomparable Upper Library of The Queen's College and ending with a crowded perambulation within the magnificent Great Hall of Christ Church and the nearby Cathedral. Wigmore Abbey and Arthur Peplow's greatly appreciated guided tour of Ludlow followed a fortnight later. Then, in another two weeks, we sped west to Pembroke Castle and St David's Cathedral. In July, Frank Olding conducted an evening of viewing quarries, erstwhile tramroads and an ironworks in Blaenau Gwent, prior to the group enjoying supper at the Mountain Air pub near Trefil. 2007's weekend trip began in Winchester Cathedral and Portchester Castle. At Gosport Submarine



Museum we were allowed inside a real submarine, much to the alarm of more than a few lady-members. On to Portsmouth's Historic Dockyard (including the Mary Rose, HMS Victory and HMS Warrior), then Salisbury Cathedral on the way home. In August, Rev. Bill Rutter introduced us to the fourth of his admirable tours of out-of-the-way Herefordshire Churches - this time a notable selection of Golden Valley churches.

Towards the end of 2007, with the arrival of her twin daughters becoming ever more imminent, Rachael Rogers passed on the onerous duties of Visits Treasurer to Margot Seabourne who has undertaken the duties with equal verve and aplomb. Our thanks to both Rachael and Margot for their excellent work. Handling a flood of visit bookings, accounting for all the money, keeping ever-changing waiting lists, filling gaps left by cancellations, and so on, are no mean tasks... undertaken voluntarily and happily.

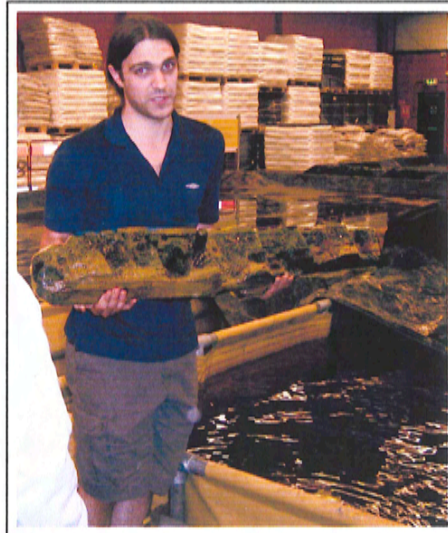


So far this year we have visited Carmarthen, (above)



Woodhenge and Stonehenge (above), Berkeley Castle and Chavenage House.

The trip to Newport's medieval ship enabled us to view at close hand the processes. being used to preserve its five hundred and fifty year old timbers.



As Frank Olding's conducted tour of industrial archaeology sites last summer was heavily over-subscribed, he has kindly agreed to repeat the "experience" - again with a full coach-load. We travel to York Minster, Durham Cathedral, Hadrian's Wall and Fountain's Abbey at the end July. Rev. Bill Rutter will take us on a guided tour of Cotswold Churches during August.

Summer Visits Contd.

Next year's summer visit programme, currently being planned, is likely to include the following, all subject to confirmation in my annual November letter:

All Day, Saturday, 23 May 2009: Dyrham Park, Bradford-on-Avon, Lacock.

All Day, Tuesday, 9 June 2009: It is hoped that Arthur Peplow will be our guide on a visit to be decided. He had to withdraw from this year's Berkeley Castle trip. We all wish him a speedy recovery.

Afternoon, Thursday, 25 June 2009: Cardiff Castle.

Evening, Tuesday, 7 July: Tour some more industrial archaeology sites with Frank Olding, supper afterwards at the Mountain Air.

Weekend, 24- 27 July 2009: Stokesay Castle, Ironbridge Gorge, Wroxeter Roman City, Shrewsbury, Powys Castle and Gardens.

All Day, 13 August 2009: Tour Gloucester Cathedral, Winchcombe Church, Hailes Abbey and Pershore Abbey with Rev. Bill Rutter.

In recent years Society members have visited many wonderful cathedrals: Canterbury and Oxford, Liverpool's Anglican and Catholic Cathedrals, Wells, Ely and St David's Winchester and Salisbury. This year we shall have a guided tour of York Minster and of Durham Cathedral. Next year a guided tour of Gloucester Cathedral is planned and maybe Lincoln Cathedral in 2010. Notwithstanding this, it will remain the intention to provide "variety" within each annual summer visits programme: castles, great houses, gardens, churches, museums, etc. Members recommendations of interesting places to visit are always most welcome. Thank you for the suggestions so far received.

Please Note: All costs are rising. Since initially budgeting for this summer's visits the coach-hire charge for two trips has increased - the extra will be paid from our credit buffer. We could save paper and postage if members who never participate in summer visits would inform me that they do not require the annual letter enclosing the future programme and booking form. This request is repeated in order to keep costs down as much as practicable. It would also save work if members booking visits would check that conflicting commitments are unlikely to cause them subsequently to change their minds and cancel their booking. Cancellations due to unforeseen circumstances are of course unavoidable. This is perfectly understood. But this year there have been quite a lot more cancellations than usual - some leaving very little time to contact people on the waiting list in an effort to fill the vacancies the cancellations cause.

When booking visits, members are advised to note dates and other vital details in their diaries - also to retain the annual summer visits letter so that they may check its contents if the need later arises.

Looking on the bright side, six of this year's visits have been fully booked and over forty members are going on the weekend trip; a total of around 340 members.

Lost Property: A pair of black-rimmed glasses in a black Rayner's case were left on a coach and reside in my safe-keeping. Would the owner kindly phone me.

John Skinner, Visits Organiser 19 Fosterville Crescent, Abergavenny: NP7 5HG Tel: 01873-853998

UPDATE ON THE MUSEUM GARDEN

We have made two new plantings into the museum garden this spring. One is an evergreen cotoneaster with yellow berries *Cotoneaster* 'Rothschildianus'. The other is *Dahlia* 'Bishop of Llandaff', which is well known and has to be present in a Victorian garden.

The roses planted last year are doing well. *Rosa* 'Compte de Chambourd' has the most beautiful scent, which is more pronounced now it is in its second year. *Rosa* 'Macrantha Ranbriita' is spreading nicely but is not yet fulfilling its set task of acting as a vandal deterrent. However the wall behind the garden is so full of flowers that they are preventing short cuts across the wall without any help. The Valerian and Ox-eye daisies have just gone wild this summer, and together with the herbs, lavender and rockery planting that we have put in it is a sea of colour at the moment.

The bed just above the garden has been planted out with four different vegetables that have been grown since the 19th century. They have sparked a lot of interest. The narrow bed the other side of the path has been planted with three different varieties of sunflowers and some nasturtium seeds by Jeanette Butt's class from Deri View school. Fortunately we had a fine morning for the event. Richard Lewis from Rural Community Action (RCA) was there to see them and was impressed by their enthusiasm. The RCA had given the History Society a grant for the setting up of the garden initially.

Paddy Beynon.

KING HENRY VIII SCHOOL AWARDS

Work on a Slavery Exhibition by a group of selected pupils from King Henry VIII School has helped them to win the annual Abergavenny Local History Society awards for 2008.

The Year 8 pupils developed a programme of lessons around a travelling display, loaned by Swansea Waterfront Museum, showing the appalling conditions that slaves were kept in, and organised a questionnaire before giving talks to their fellow students and parents.

Among those invited to one of the classes were Andrew Deathe and Kay Staffen from the museum who brought along two original bracelets used on the slaves for the children to inspect, and **Irena and Stephen Morgan**, Chair and Treasurer of the history society.



The pupils were Joe Atkinson, Hannah Miles, David Morgan, Zoe Jofeh, Zoe Bradley, Elinor Burch, Ffion Nelmes, Owen Haslegrave, Joe Pugh, Gareth Brinn, Alex Gregory and Alex Williams.

The awards were presented by the Chair at the end of term.

- The Chair also presented the prizes in the Vocal solo under 25 competition of the Abergavenny Eisteddfod. The winner was Osian Gwynn, from Llanelli, who sang the Count's Aria, from Marriage of Figaro. The runner-up was Elizabeth Triley, of Abertillery, (Kommt ein schlanker Bursch gegangen, from Der Freischutz by Carl Maria von Weber).