Abergavenny Local History Society

Honorary Members of the Society, The Mayor and Mayoress Mr and Mrs Douglas and Edna Edwards and Society president Mr Gwyn Jones and Mrs Beryl Jones. on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Abergavenny Museum

NEWSLETTER No 25

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PROGRAMME

2009

Thurs. 324th. Sept	Prof. Gareth Williams. MARTYRS OF THE ARENA MUSIC, SPORT AND SOCIETY IN WALES 1870 TO 1914
Thurs. 15th. Oct.	Lt. Col. Charles Jackman CAVALRY IN THE ROMAN ARMY
Thurs. 26th. Nov.	Mrs Rosemary Scadden WELSH GIRLS IN SERVICE BETWEEN THE WARS

If you have not yet renewed your membership, (payable by 1st May), please send your subscription (£10 per person) to the Membership Secretary as soon as you can so that your new card can be sent to you

2010

Thurs. 21st. Jan.	Mr Ryeland Wallace. SUFFRAGETTES IN ABERGAVENNY
Thurs. 25th.Feb.	Mrs Ruth Richardson. MISTRESS BLANCHE PARRY. CONFIDANTE TO QUEEN ELIZABETH I.
Thurs 18th. March.	To be announced
Thurs. 29th. April.	Mr Stuart Wilson THE LOST CITY OF TRELLECH
Thurs. 21st. May	33rd. ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING Followed by : Mr Frank Olding PREHISTORIC ABERGAVENNY

THE SOCIETY MEETS AT THE BOROUGH THEATRE AT 7.30 pm

Tentative Programme -2010 Visits

Saturday, 22nd May (all day): Bowood House/Gardens (Rhododendrons/Azaleas); Cirencester (Lunch); Duntisbourne Rouse Saxon Church; Tewkesbury Abbey (Tea).

Tuesday, 8th June (all day): Hellens (former Monastery near Much Marcle); Ledbury (Lunch); Elgar Museum; Worcester Cathedral (Tea):

Thursday, 24th June (afternoon): Caerphilly Castle.

Tuesday, 6th July (evening): Frank Olding's Industrial Archaeology Tour (Repeat of oversubscribed 2009 Tour); Pub Supper afterwards.

Friday, 23rd to Monday, 26th July (3-night weekend): Bosworth Field (1485 Battle Site); Lincoln Cathedral/Bishop's Palace; Doddington Hall; Belvoir Castle (Members favoured this tour rather than the North Wales trip, both suggested previously).

Thursday, 12th August (all day): Sudeley Castle; Broadway (Lunch); Snowshill Manor (Tea).

The 2010 programme will be confirmed in November and budgeted to reflect reduced coach fuel prices. Hotel charges may also be lower. Every effort is made to keep costs down. Margot Seabourne's considerate handling of the many bookings and proficient financial accounting remain very much appreciated. Kindly inform her of any booking changes or unavoidable withdrawals as soon as possible so that members on a waiting list can be contacted and substituted. Grateful for your assistance.

Retirements

Mr Arthur Peplow and the Reverend Bill Rutter have guided one visit per year during many summers which members have appreciated very much indeed. Regrettably, they now have problems with getting about and prolonged standing. In wishing them both well and good health, we also sincerely thank them. Their learned expertise, as well as the interest and enjoyment they inspired, will be greatly missed.

2009 Visits

Our final guided tour with Bill takes us on August 13th to Higham Church, Gloucester Cathedral, Hailes and Pershore Abbeys. With Arthur unable to accompany us on June 9th, members dedicated their trips round St Mary Redcliffe, Bristol's Museum and the Cathedral to him. Similarly, those who went to Bradford-on-Avon, Dyrham Park and Lacock Abbey on May 23rd dedicated their day to Alan Spink who had organised and led the Society's summer visits for 23 years; a record unlikely to be surpassed.

John Skinner,
Visits Organiser
24th June 2009

The River at Bradford on Avon

The Saxon Church at Bradford on Avon

REPORT OF VISIT TO BEAUPREAU
May 2009

Before going, we gathered pictures and photos for weeks – a few from the History Society but mainly from our own books and files - and took lots of photographs of places of historical interest in Abergavenny. These had to be selected, printed and decisions taken about how to arrange them and what brief comments could be made. We translated the comments into French and then printed them on the computer. Planning how to mount the display took up some time – and we had to have alternatives as no-one could tell us how much space we would have or whether the boards could be viewed from all sides or just one. So we took the big display file with everything in and had to wait to see how much we could display. Even sticking 4 velcro spots on each of 77 items took considerable time.

The journey to Beaupreau was interesting – coach to Plymouth, ferry to Roscoff and coach to Beaupreau - lovely countryside, sunshine and lots of different aspects to engage our attention. We were fortunate that our host, Gilles Leroy, was the one person in Beaupreau with a great interest in and knowledge of the social history of the town. A former journalist, now teaching French at the local college, and a departmental councillor, he had written a book on a particular incident in the town's history and was busy writing another for the tercentenary of the college. He, his wife and student daughters made us very welcome and comfortable. It helped that we were able to speak French fairly fluently as his wife did not speak English and he was a perfectionist. He told us a joke: What do you call a person who speaks 3 languages? Trilingual. Two language? Bilingual. One language? English.

On Friday afternoon we were taken out by our host for a car tour of places of historical interest nearby, followed by the opening of an art exhibition by painters from both towns. After that it was dinner en famille and a couple of hours mounting the display.

On Saturday we had to be in the old town by 9.00 a.m. to find out where our stall was and set up the display boards – having acquired trestle tables from various places. We shared a covered stall with Monmouthshire Tourist Board and helped to decorate the stall with flags and carriers they had brought and used our blutak for posters on the sides and back of the canvas tenting. The first half hour was very quiet, with hardly anyone coming down our street and we wondered if it was all a waste of time and effort, but after that, people appeared on the street in greater numbers and we had a steady stream of visitors. It was good that Bryn and I were able to converse readily in French, because so many people were able to ask for further information and we were able to give it. It would not have been easy for a non-fluent speaker of French to have communicated satisfactorily. As it was, I think quite a lot of people now know more about Abergavenny and its history, and since they also picked up tourist brochures from the stall beside us, they may come to visit.

The day was full of events. We had a loudspeaker near the stall so could listen to the stage performances in the town square, and occasionally, if it was quiet, we took turns to have a stroll round the other stalls. Parades passed us at intervals – French biniou player and accordion with people in traditional costumes, "Scottish" pipers, line dancers, Raglan's bell ringers, Abergavenny Borough Band, mediaeval knights and ladies. There was a wedding which Abergavenny's mayor officiated at, along

with his French and German counterparts, traditional wooden table games in one square, children trying out sword fighting, a re-enacted swordfight, games of sand boules and petanque. The weather was hot and sunny – more like a summer's day. We were on duty until 6 p.m. when we packed up, were taken home for a quick wash and brush up before an evening meal (for around 350 people) and concert – with lots of speeches too, at the Leisure Centre, which was decorated with the ship "Amitie" – Friend-Ship.

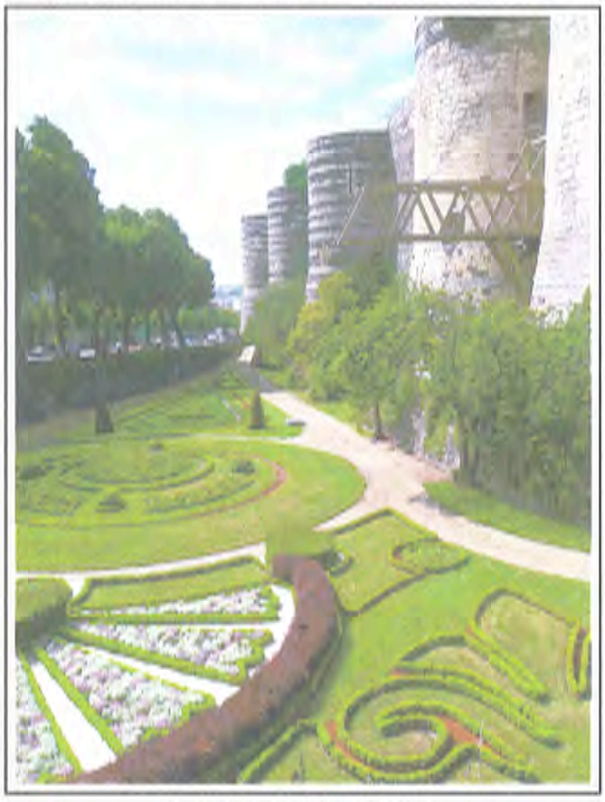
Sunday morning started with an ecumenical service and a procession from the church to the park where a grove of chestnut-leaved oaks had been planted and a maypole had been erected. Victor Barrett and his counterpart – mayors when the twinning began – unveiled a commemorative plaque and wine and biscuits were served. A friendly local man insisted we taste the local (sweet) white wine as well as those we had chosen from the table ourselves.

After a late lunch we were taken on a walking tour of the old town by our host (lots of photo opportunities). Then he had to officiate at the cycle race prize- giving, so, armed with a map, we explored on our own (more photos) and then found our own way home, where his wife had been worrying in case we got lost on the way. After another lovely meal, we were off again – to a concert in the new concert hall by French and Welsh performers – excellent.

Monday was an early start for a day of tourism instead of work and speeches, and it was fantastic. First we visited the Cointreau factory outside Angers – great visit and cocktails at the end!

THE COINTREAU DISTILLERY

Lunch we found in the bistros and bars in a shopping mall and then we went to the Chateau at Angers.



CHATEAU D'ANGERS

The star attraction there is the Tapestry of the Apocalypse - a fabulous woven story of the events in the Book of Revelations. We could have spent days examining it and the castle more closely. And the final part of the day was a visit to a vineyard and wine tasting. See the Chronicle of 14th May for a picture of that. The coach driver had to limit us to a box of 6 bottles per person he said, because of the weight of wine if 40 + people all bought lots. Some may have drunk their share on the way home!
Dinner at home and packing ready for an early start for home on Tuesday concluded the evening. Next morning, after farewells and promises to meet again, we left by coach and 17 hours later were home.

A fantastic experience and we hope to return the hospitality we were shown in France on their return visit here. We gave the two Abergavenny History Society DVDs, donated by the Society, to the chairman of the Beaupreau twinning committee and to our host and they were very pleased with them and promised to let other people in the town see them.

From a (social) history angle, it was fascinating to learn so much that you don't get in textbooks as well as to open a lot of French eyes to the highlights of Abergavenny through the ages.

Bryn and Margot Seabourne

Chairman's Report for AGM 2009

I'm pleased to say we have had another very successful year and our membership stands at 389, compared with 396 last year. I am sure you will agree that a £10 subscription is still exceptionally good value.

We have had many highlights in the lecture programme again this year for which we thank our lecture secretaries David and Barbara Powell. Sadly, they are retiring and September sees the start of their final programme. We have two volunteers, Dai Morgan and Marian Senior, to replace them. Barbara and David, and Christine Scott before them, have set a very high standard and I'm sure Dai and Marian will easily cope with the challenge. Barbara and David are taking over as the joint Social Organisers.

We are very fortunate to have such an excellent committee. Their commitment, hard work and efficiency are very much appreciated. Our grateful thanks go to our secretary, Gill Wakley, who does the PowerPoint projection. She is the Minutes Secretary and job-share press officer. Our thanks also go to the Treasurer Stephen Morgan and to our Membership Secretary, Sue Smith.

There was another excellent visits programme organised by Brigadier John Skinner and I would like to thank him and Margot Seabourne, the Visits Treasurer, for dealing with the bookings and payments for the trips. There is a lot of hard work involved in that too especially with the cancellations and the replacements and I'm sure that everyone appreciates that.

Our thanks go to our longest serving committee member, Ken Key. Ken, 83, is our Newsletter Editor, one of our projectionists and our sound engineer, and the 'Churchwatch' co-ordinator - the society provides the stewards at St Mary's Priory Church for one day a week.
Ken was one of two of our members who received the Abergavenny Town Council's Citizens Award from the outgoing Mayor, Councillor John Prosser.

Harry Gilbert, who has retired as our auditor, was another recipient. Unfortunately, Harry, who is 90 years old, has been unwell, so the Mayor and Mayoress of Abergavenny went to his home to present him with the award. Our best wishes go to him for a speedy recovery. Harry was too ill to finish the audit of our accounts this year and our grateful thanks go to a recent recruit to the committee, Ian Smith, for stepping in at the last minute and doing them.

Our society organises the floodlighting scheme at Abergavenny Castle. I'm sure that Paddy Beynon, the floodlighting secretary, would be delighted if more members were to contribute £5 to pay for a week's floodlighting of your choice to help keep the scheme going. Paddy is head gardener at the Victorian garden in the castle which continues to bloom.

Among our many activities are the guided Town Tours and we will be organising walks around the castle and town this summer at the end of July and the beginning of August. Please log onto our website or watch the local Press for dates. The guides are Ken, Gill, John, Bryn Seabourne, Jane White, Paddy, me and a new recruit, Dai Morgan.

Another new venture has been the Market Tour in partnership with Abergavenny Farmers' Market. There's complimentary tea / coffee / cake at the end of the tours and they have proved to be very popular. In this team are Gill, Jane, Marian, Dai and me.

Our newer members may like to know that we serve Fairtrade tea and coffee after each lecture, thanks to Jane and Jeanette Butt.

Sadly, four of our founder members passed away this last year. Alan Spink, the Secretary for 19 years and summer visits' organiser for 23 years; Howard Pullan, Chairman of the Street Survey Committee among many other things; Malcolm Wills Wood and Eric Williams. We acknowledge their part in the success of our society in their individual ways.

Each year we make a number of awards and grants to King Henry VIII School. Year 8 pupils excelled themselves with a slavery project which also won a prize in the WSSA Curriculum awards. Two A-Level students who were going on to study history at university received grants for books. We are also sponsoring prizes totalling £200 for the third year at the Abergavenny Eisteddfod to be held in June.

I am very pleased to say that our society is publishing a new book by Frank Olding, **Roman Abergavenny, an Update.** I will be issuing invitations to all members for the book launch, probably in July.

Our DVD, **The Story of Abergavenny from Stone Age to Our Age** was launched last September and it has been extremely successful. Sales are even better than anticipated. The film is on show daily at the museum.

We have carried out a Children's Plaques / Standing Stone project. On this sub-committee are Gill, Jane and myself. Pupils from nine local schools took part in research. The standing stones are a tribute celebrating the work of Lord and Lady Llanover in promoting Welsh culture, and also the importance of Abergavenny in the development of the modern National Eisteddfod. They are sited near the Gorsedd circle in Swan Meadow. The official unveiling will be held shortly.

In partnership with King Henry VIII School and Llanover Primary School, the society is involved in another project to celebrate the 150th anniversary of 'Big Ben', that's the 'Great Bell' in the clock tower installed while Lord Llanover was First Commissioner of Works. The Llanover children from the primary school and KHS have helped to design images on a ceramic plaque made by Ned Heywood. The project was funded through the RAE Herbert Charitable Trust and we thank Mr Herbert for that. The plaque will probably be presented to the Speaker at the Houses of Parliament in July and is likely to be housed at the museum in the Clock Tower. We wanted a tie-in with this plaque and the standing stones in Swan Meadow so the same image of Sir Benjamin Hall is used on both.

We had a stall at Abergavenny Food Festival for the first time last September and in April we took part in the first Monmouthshire Weekend Festival of walking. Gill and I took the visitors around the town and Castle Meadows. There was a stop at the Tithe Barn and a look at the magnificent Abergavenny Tapestry. Thank you to Sheila Bevan for opening it up especially, and to the Rev Canon Jeremy Winston for granting permission. Next year, there are plans for a week long festival. Bryn and Margot represented us on a successful French twinning visit to Beaupreau.

I will take this opportunity to thank the Borough Theatre staff for being so helpful throughout the season. We are always made to feel comfortable and welcome here.

It has been a busy and exciting time for the society and I am sure that the coming year will be another one with much to celebrate. This year sees the 50th anniversary of Abergavenny Museum. The Portable Antiquities Roadshow which we are helping to organise in August will be one of a series of birthday celebrations.

The strength of an organisation like ours depends on its members. If you would like to get involved, please contact us. I would like to thank you all for your support during the past year and hope that you continue to support us in the coming year, and that concludes my report.

Irena Morgan

Chair.

Update: In my report, I mentioned that Ian Smith had kindly agreed to step in at the last minute to complete the inspection of the Society's annual accounts for the AGM. Ian had, however, become a co-opted member of the executive committee, and the accounts will have to be independently examined again before submission to the Charity Commission.

IMM