



Abergavenny Local History Society



Frank Olding at Garndderys 5th July 2011. Pen Cerrig Calch and Usk Valley. (KAK)

# NEWSLETTER No 27

## AUGUST 2011

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email [alhs@live.co.uk](mailto:alhs@live.co.uk) to be put on the Society's emailing list.

[www.abergavennylocalhistorysociety.org.uk](http://www.abergavennylocalhistorysociety.org.uk)

Charity registration number 1098582

**PROGRAMME****2011**

Thurs. 22nd. Sept	<b>Jeremy Knight</b> THE CIVIL WAR AND RESTORATION IN WALES
Thurs. 20th Oct.	<b>Tim Ryan</b> THE AUST FERRY AND THE RESCUE OF THE SEVERN PRINCESS.
Thurs. 10th. Nov.	<b>Grant Muter</b> VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE IN MONMOUTHSHIRE 1480-1680
Dec.	NO LECTURE

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

**2012**

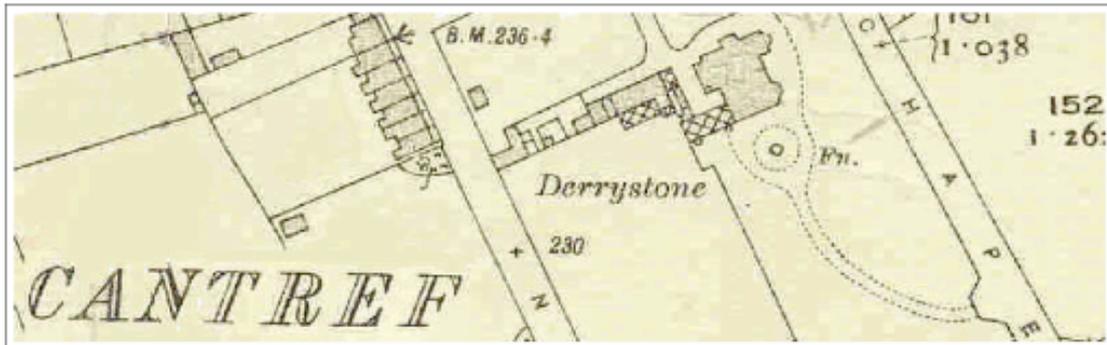
Thurs. 19th. Jan.	<b>Dr Derek Bissell</b> JOHN OGILBY'S ROADS ON THE WELSH BORDERS.
Thurs. 23rd. Feb.	<b>Jonathon Jenkins</b> HOWICK FARM FROM 1306 TO THE PRESENT
Thurs 15th. March.	<b>Dr. Celyn Gurdun-Williams</b> LADY LLANOVER
Thurs. 12th. April.	<b>Dr Peter Guest</b> ISCA: THE ROMAN LEGIONARY FORTRESS AT CAERLEON
Thurs. 17th. May.	35th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING Followed by : <b>Frank Olding</b> INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE CLYDACH GORGE

THE SOCIETY MEETS AT THE BOROUGH THEATRE AT 7.30 pm.

Please bring your card to all meetings.  
Social events will be publicised separately.

### WHAT IS A CANTREF?

Someone asked the other day what a Cantref was. The brief answer is that it was an administrative district in mediaeval Wales - not the pub on the Brecon Road! Read on for a more detailed explanation.



Land in mediaeval times in what was to become Wales was divided into cantrefi, which were subdivided into cymydau or commotes. The name cantref comes from *cant* (a hundred) and *tref*, which now means a town in Welsh, but was used for much smaller settlements. A commote (*cwmwd*, plural *cymydau*, less frequently *cymydoedd*), sometimes spelt in older documents as *cymwd*, was the secular division of land in medieval Wales. The Welsh word derives from the prefix *cym-* ("together", "with") and the noun *bod* ("home, abode"). The English word "commote" is derived from the Middle Welsh *cymwt*.

The basic unit of land was the tref. In theory, 100 trefi made up a cantref (literally, "one hundred settlements"), and half or a third of a cantref was a cwmwd. In practice the actual numbers varied greatly. Commotes were the geographical divisions through which defence and justice were organised. Commotes were further divided into maenorau or maenolydd. A chieftain, usually related to the ruling Prince of the Kingdom, would be in charge of a commote. His court was situated in a special tref, referred to as a maerdref. Here the bonded villagers who farmed the chieftain's estate lived, together with the court officials and servants.

Most of the cantrefi were divided into two or three commotes but the largest, Cantref Mawr in Ystrad Tywi (now in Carmarthenshire) was divided into seven commotes. Ynys Mon (Anglesey), where there were three cantrefi, Cemais, Aberffraw and Rhosyr gives you an idea of the area covered by a cantref, but they varied in size.

Some cantrefi were kingdoms and they often marked the boundary between dialects. Each cantref had its own court of law, which was an assembly of Uchelwyr (literally high men) who were the main landowners in the area. The most senior of the Prince's men, or the Prince himself would preside. Apart from the judges there would be a clerk, an usher and sometimes two professional pleaders.

The cantref court dealt with crimes, the determination of boundaries and matters concerning inheritance. The commote court later took over many of the functions of the cantref court, and, in some areas, the names of the commotes are much better known than the name of the cantref of which they formed parts.

For further reading: John Davies, Nigel Jenkins, Menna Baines and Peredur I Lynch. *The Welsh Academy Encyclopedia of Wales*. University of Wales Press Cardiff. 2008.

**Gill Wakley**

## SUMMER VISITS

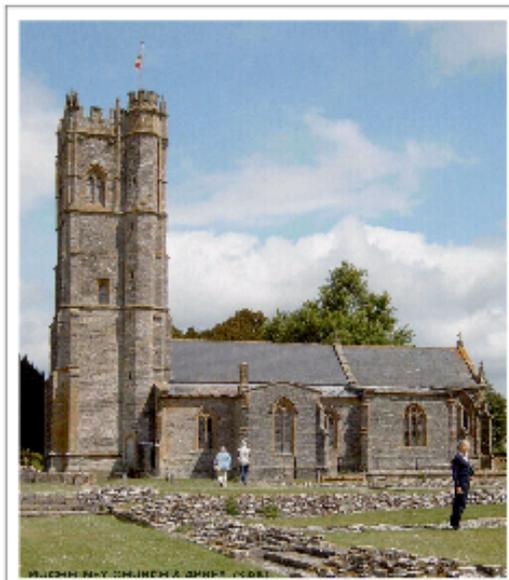
In keeping with former years, the 2010 programme included a variety of attractions.

All but two tours were overbooked, necessitating waiting lists and, to alleviate failed-bookers' disappointment, "repeats" are an option. Members' suggestions for "repeats" and for future visits are invited and much appreciated.

Bowood's rhododendron and azalea walks in May 2010 are memorable, as are visiting Duntisbourne Rous Saxon church and later last summer Hellens, the Elgar Museum, Worcester Cathedral, Caerphilly Castle, the repeat of Frank Olding's 2009 industrial archaeology tour, Sudeley Castle and the "treasure trove" at Snowhill Manor. On the last weekend in July some forty members visited Bosworth Field battle site, Lincoln Cathedral, the medieval Bishop's Palace remains, Doddington Hall and Calke Abbey.

Earlier this "summer" we spent a sunny day in Somerset at historic Muchelney Abbey and Montacute House. Revd. Bill Rutter took us to two wonderful ancient churches, Llananno and Disserth, in mid-Wales. We visited nearby Abbey-cwm-hir Hall, with so much to admire. Many on that trip requested a "repeat" which will be arranged in 2013.

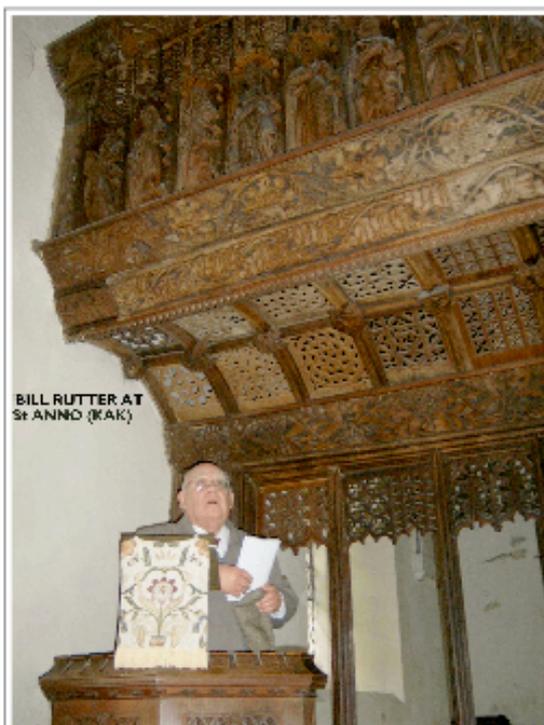
The Cardiff National Museum and Art Gallery visit was much enjoyed..



Frank Olding's latest industrial archaeology tour, so illuminating and enthralling, was oversubscribed and will be repeated next year for those on the waiting list and other members who wish to go. The Highclere Castle trip is fully booked. The Kent weekend in late July has proved very popular as well.



MONTACUTE (MS)



BILL RUTTER AT  
St ANNO (KAK)

The Flanders and Somme Battlefields/Cemeteries tour programme will comprise:-

**Fri. 4th. November 2011** Leave Abergavenny 7.am. for Dover, ferry to Calais. Our coach continues to Ieper (Ypres) to a hotel just off the main town square.  
**Sat.** Tyne Cot (largest British Military Cemetery), Passchendaele Battlefields, Hellfire Corner, German Cemetery, Toc-H Canteen Poperinghe,  
**Sun.** Somme Battlefields/Cemeteries, Vimy Ridge Museum and Tunnels. Canadian, South African, British (Thiepval) Memorials.  
**Mon.** Return to Abergavenny approx 7 pm.

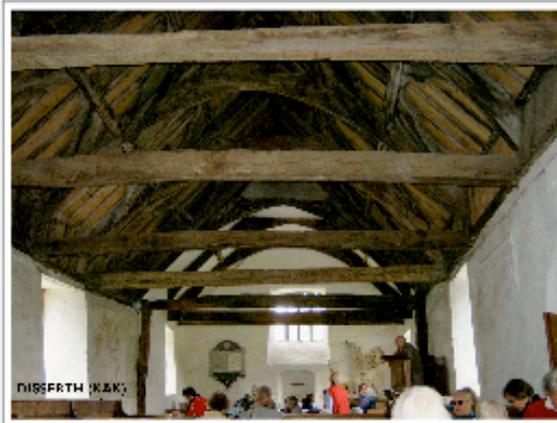
**Tentative Summer Visits Programme in 2012:**

**Sat 19 May (all day):** Chedworth Roman Villa near Cheltenham, (Stow-on-the-Wold lunch), Hidcote Manor Garden near Chipping Campden (including tea).

**Tue 5 Jun. (all day):** Revd. Bill Rutter's guided tour of Margam Abbey, (Bridgend lunch), Ewenny Priory and Church, Llantwit Major Church, (Cowbridge tea).

**Thu 21 Jun. (afternoon):** Eastnor Castle near Ledbury (including tea).

**Tue 3 Jul. (evening):** repeat of Frank Olding's over-subscribed 2011 local industrial archaeology tour and pub supper afterwards.



**Fri 27- Mon 30 Jul. (weekend):** Exeter Cathedral, Buckfast Abbey, Castle Drogo, Buckland Abbey, Knightshayes Court..

**Thu 9 Aug. (all day):** Stokesay Castle (13th century fortified manor house), (Ludlow lunch), Shipton Hall/Saxon Church (including tea).



**Margot Seabourne's** voluntary and skilful administration of members' visit bookings, waiting lists, withdrawals and the accounts remains invaluable. Many thanks, Margot.

**JOHN SKINNER**, Visits Organiser (01873-853998)



**OUR GOLDEN PIONEERS**

### UPDATE ON THE MUSEUM GARDEN

Despite the cold winter the only casualty in the garden was the Rosemary bush, which has been replaced. I gather Rosemary was a common victim in other gardens. I was pleased that the holly planted last year survived. This is the Silver Hedgehog holly, *Ilex aquifolium* 'Ferox Argentea' cultivated since 1662. It has small leaves, the upper surface being puckered and furnished with short sharp spines. The leaves have creamy-white margins, and the spines are also cream in colour. At the moment it is still very small, but should eventually make a medium sized bush. It can be found at the entrance to the garden on the left of the path.



Jeanette Butt's class from Deri View visited the garden in May, and enjoyed planting out the two small areas above the main garden. The one with ground-cover sweet peas - which is a first - is coming along nicely. The second, by the path, will be red Gaillardias. As there is considerable reseeding from the Marigolds planted last year, there should be a riot of clashing oranges, yellows and reds by the end of the summer. A sight to gladden a Victorian heart.



**Paddy Beynon**

## MY SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY TO ABERGAVENNY

from The Gobannian November 1964

I am indebted to Bryn Seabourne for this moving story. I make no apologies for printing it in full if in rather small type as to edit it would destroy the author's style of writing and the tremendous regard he has for the town and people of Abergavenny. K.A.K.

The various circumstances of destiny have, no doubt, led a number of people very far from the places where they spent the best part of their childhood and where they received their first education. Many of them were eventually brought back to these places by a certain turn of events and can tell of the emotions they felt when they came again in contact with the familiar spots whose sight revived so many remembrances.

Among these, the various episodes of the schooldays are often brought up most vividly by one's memory, as, by a curious phenomenon, people easily remember the minutest details of the life they led when they were still in infancy or in their 'teens' whereas they are unable to recall what they did, let us say, two or three years ago.

My purpose in writing these few lines is to explain my 'case', to give an account of my return, if only a brief one, to Abergavenny, and this after an absence of 48 years.

I am a Belgian by birth. I was a boy of 14 when, in October 1914, I landed in the British Isles as a war refugee. Luck would have it that the Committee of Relief established in London left me and my family in the care of Sir Ivor Herbert (the late Lord Treowen) who sent his daughter, the Hon. Mrs. Roch, to contact us and escort us from London to Llanantffraed Court where several rooms had been put at our disposal.

A few days after our arrival, the members of a local committee informed us that they would put me in a village school, at a little place on the road to Llanarth, named "The Pit".

In the fall of the next year, my progress in English, having been judged satisfactory, I was led to Abergavenny and became a scholar of King Henry VIII Grammar School. The distance between Llanantffraed and Abergavenny being 5 miles, I was given a bicycle to cover the daily journeys. In the course of 1916 my parents changed their abode and we lived in Abergavenny, where we remained until 1917.

I will not, of course, write a detailed account of the events which happened during my stay in Abergavenny, as this would take up the whole space of the Gobannian. Let it suffice me to state that, looking back on that period, I consider it as one of the happiest of my whole life. The outbreak of the war and the fact of being suddenly dumped into a foreign country was already in itself an exciting adventure for my boy's soul. Moreover I had been enchanted from the start by the cordial welcome of the English, as much as by the beauty of the land. I had hitherto travelled very little in my native country and had never been abroad. I was all the more impressed when I came to South Wales and saw mountains for the first time. I very soon got to love Abergavenny and the landscape around it. But my dearest memories are linked with the King Henry VIII Grammar school and with everything and everybody connected with it: the school staff, the pals, the sports and games, the good jokes and even the little fights.

From the beginning, very good bonds of comradeship and even friendship were established. Therefore, I experienced a severe shock when my parents suddenly decided, in 1917, to leave Abergavenny in order to go and live in London. I had no alternative but to follow them, much to my grief. However, I harboured in my bosom the staunch determination to return some day, and the sooner the better. But then came the Armistice. I returned to Belgium with my parents, which meant that my life took another turning and that I had to adapt myself again to new conditions. Fate drew me in a whirlpool of events and years passed quickly with different fortunes, good and bad. How many

scenes are recorded on the film of those past years! my leaving school, professional ventures, then marriage, children, new jobs, travels then the Second World War, the prisoner's camp, then another Peace and my return to new activities.

In spite of the happenings of all these long years, I have never forgotten Abergavenny and have always entertained the desire and the hope of going back there some day to see "that dear old place" again. At times I was literally obsessed by memories of the past; I very often dreamed that I was actually back there, my chief concern in those dreams being to find the Sugar Loaf and the building of the K.H.G.S.! How often have I reviewed in mind the scenes of my enchanted stay? How many times have I, in conversation with members of my family, brought the conversation on the topic of the good old Abergavenny days and expressed my purpose to travel thither as soon as a suitable occasion would spring up. However, after my marriage, I occasionally took my vacation on the continent and my quest to South Wales got postponed from year to year.

Incredible as it may seem, the real chance of realizing my dream came to me when I was over 62 years of age. I decided to make the trip in spite of the fact that some 48 years had elapsed since I last set a foot on the English soil. My family discouraged this venture, arguing that, after so many years, I would probably find none of my old acquaintances alive and would probably be disappointed, but I was drawn towards Abergavenny like soft iron to a magnet and no argument could induce me to change my plans.

So, one fine morning in April 1963, I left my home town of Brussels and set out on this "Sentimental Journey". After a very good trip via Ostend, Dover, London and Newport I landed, after dark, at Abergavenny, feeling very elated and anticipating a wonderful time. I easily found my way to the Angel hotel, which was to be my fixed residence during my week's stay.

Again, for reasons of space, I must refrain from writing a detailed report of all my activities day by day, and I must content myself with giving just a few impressions on what proved to be a most enchanting vacation.

There was, of course, the risk of being disappointed by the fact that, during the years of my long absence, my imagination might have played tricks on me and made me see the town and the surrounding countryside in an unreal light and exaggeratedly beautiful. But, in reality, my renewed contact did not deceive me in the least. I felt as if I had left just a few months ago.

Abergavenny was just as I knew it, a clean, pleasant, busy and picturesque town, (so colourful). Apart from a good number of new and modernized shops the main streets were practically the same as when, as a boy of 15, I ambulated through them. Every building, every corner, every crossroad had its story to tell, from the Public Market, the Town Hall where I used to attend concerts, the fish and chip shop (still there!) the old Cinema, the narrow street where I once had a fight, the saddler's shop of Russell Williams where a gang of boys, to which I belonged, used to gather after school hours and revel in piquant jokes, the house whose front I bumped into with my bicycle in a desperate attempt to avoid being run over by a motorcar, etc. But where I realized that the years had brought about the natural process of progress and modernization was when I reached the new and beautifully laid-out quarters on the North East side of the town, the style of architecture of these streets being very similar to the one which prevails on the outskirts of my home city.

Now, as regards the surrounding country, the landscape of the Usk

valley and the mountains, I was very much more taken in by their beauty than I ever was when I was a youngster. As a schoolboy, although nature appealed to me in a certain way, I just took its beauty for granted, whereas now, as an adult, I saw things with different eyes, with the eyes of one who has learned to see and appreciate things. How very beautiful this Usk valley looked to me! And the river herself, with her clear, swift and sparkling stream - how I loved to look at it from the bridge and from the road leading to the cemetery! I once went under the bridge and across the blocks of rock to the bank and thrust my hands in the cool and fast-running water, feeling that this was bracing me up as if I had taken a tonic.

What to say of the mountains? Here again I must say that, far from being disappointed, I found them to be much higher and more impressive than what my poor memory had given me to expect. How I gazed at them with vivid remembrances of past climbs. That dear old Sugarloaf! How often had I been to the top where, telescope clasped to the eye, I scrutinized the whole surrounding country! But the Blorengse seemed to me now particularly imposing, looking formidably across the valley, as if menacing to overpower the town.

But the real romance of my "Sentimental Journey" was yet to come, and it came with my search for the K.H.G.S., my visits to the old and the new premises of the same, and the incredibly wonderful "connections" which resulted.

I may, of course, be wrong, but I think it quite natural that a man should be drawn sentimentally and for the sake of "Good Old Times" to the spots where he spent happy days as a schoolboy, the impressions of early youth having deeply affected his conscious and subconscious self.

When I got to the gate of what I called "my school" i.e. the old building and premises of the K.H.G.S., I felt as if H.G. Wells' time machine had turned the handle back to 48 years ago! I went into the playground towards the school in a daze, as if wondering if I were not just day-dreaming. The gate, the yard, the gravel, the whole building, every stone of it, seemed to speak to me and scenes of the past came back to my memory as if I were just looking at some film on which they had been recorded. I could see myself a young boy of 15, in short trousers and wearing my school cap, playing football during the intervals. There I was, charging Ted Morgan, or stopping Arthur Hunt, or dribbling the ball past a stockily-built lad by the name of Bush. Then the other visions came; I could see the playground in the winter, all covered with a thick layer of snow, and the epic snowball battles which went on even after school hours.

I was wandering about the grounds like a sleepwalker when a gentleman came out of the school and enquired about my presence there. I explained to him that I was an old scholar and told him about the object of my visit. He introduced himself as being Mr. Mann, headmaster of the Grofield Secondary Modern School and informed me that the K.H.G.S. had been removed to a new and modern building on the outskirts of the town.

However, when he heard of my "Sentimental Journey", Mr. Mann very obligingly offered to show me around the class-rooms of "My Old School" which visit I, of course, gladly and gratefully accepted.

Here again, the sight of these rooms brought back to my mind a real flood of souvenirs. I remembered the room where Miss Webb taught us the rudiments of French, and where we sang "The Minstrel Boy, D'ye Ken John Peel and Auld Lang Syne. And, in the same room, Mr. Ralphs told the story of how the French had been licked at Agincourt and taught us how to recite Tennyson's poems. And then, there was Miss Marlowe, pale and slender, doing her best to make us acquainted with the arcanae of

mathematics. In the adjoining classroom, Mr. Hilton, loud-voiced and luminous, hammered physics into our unwilling brains and performed some chemical experiments which have nothing to do with the making of perfumes. And then, last but not least, was the headmaster Mr. Sifton, who more than once summoned me to his office but who never gave me the cane in spite of the fact that I really deserved it. I can clearly recollect the speech delivered by Mr. Sifton to a large audience when, after my first year's presence at school, I came out first in English composition, an event which caused quite a commotion among the boys. I was very sorry to hear that Mr. Sifton and all those masters were no longer alive. So I wondered what had become of some of the boys whose names came readily to my mind: William Greene, Arthur Pavord, Hubert Pugh, Billy Shackleton, Leekes, Foster and many others.

When, after the visit of the classrooms, Mr. Mann ushered me into his office, I asked him how I could get some information about the fate and whereabouts of these old school comrades. He then advised me to go and see Mr. William Powell whom he thought would provide useful information about the "Old Boys". So, after having thanked Mr. Mann for his courtesy and helpfulness and after having cast a last look on the grounds around the building, I started off to Brecon House.

I must say that Mr. Mann could not have given me better advice. Indeed, from that moment on, the events took a swift and wonderful turning. Mr. William Powell gratified me with a most hearty welcome and generous hospitality and made me feel immediately at home. Although I had come to these people as a complete stranger, they gave me the impression of being among friends. Mr. Powell was all the more interested by my quest as I brought him news from my Uncle who had been in service at Messrs Powell's Garage during the First World War.

From the very first moment of this meeting I was no longer a lonely souvenir-seeker, as, thanks to Mr. Powell, the K.H.G.S. was informed of my presence. This led to spontaneous results for, on the next day I received an invitation to attend a concert which would be given in the building of the new K.H.G.S. and this I most gladly accepted.

The evening of that concert can be ranked among my best souvenirs. I shall never forget the very kind welcome I received at the hands of Dr Isaac, the headmaster and Mr. H Sharpe, Assistant Headmaster. I was introduced to some of the masters and they all expressed their appreciation of my faithfulness to the memory of my schooldays at the K.H.G.S and the will to come back and see the school again, even after such a long absence. I was indeed treated as a guest of honour when, led into the large and beautiful concert hall, I was given a seat in the front row, right next to the governors. The concert itself proved to be of a high standard from the artistic point of view and was most enjoyable. The electric organ recital was especially outstanding. Ultimately, I was led, with the whole audience, to visit the classrooms of the school and this gave me the occasion to realize the means which progress had provided for modern education.

This wonderful evening held in store another surprise in the form of an invitation by Mr. H Sharpe to accompany him to his home. On arrival there, he introduced me to his charming wife, a Frenchwoman by birth, with whom I had a pleasant chat in my native tongue. As we were talking, there suddenly came in a little gentleman whom I recognized, Mr. Arthur Pavord, one of the "Old Boys" of my schooldays. It was a real treat to see each other again and we had a long and pleasant talk, evoking a great number of little incidents in which we and some of our comrades of the past had been involved.

On the next day, thanks to the information imparted by Mr. Pavord I went to visit two other old acquaintances, namely, Mr. Russell Williams and Mr. B Shackleton who received me quite

amiably and from whom I gathered more news about some of the other "Old Boys". Some of these were deceased and others had left Abergavenny.

With reference to my visit to the K.H.G.S. I forgot to mention that I had been invited by the governors to lunch at school on the next day. Approaching the building, which I now saw in full daylight, I could look at it at leisure and fully appreciate its general outlook and importance. On the playground games were going on between small groups of both sexes which revealed to me that mixed education had now been adopted. This I considered an improvement. I was met on the threshold by Mr. Sharpe who again ushered me into the office of Dr. Isaac, the headmaster. The latter had summoned all the masters and teachers to whom I had not been introduced the night before. All of them welcomed me as if I were a brother just come back from abroad.

When lunch time came, I was led into the huge hall where some 300 pupils took their daily lunch. I was given a seat at the table of the masters, right next to Mr. Sharpe who, to put me quite at ease, served me himself. While I was enjoying the dishes, which were excellent, I noticed how well everything was organized, and also how the good behaviour and discipline was observed by all these boys and girls, as compared to the unruly youth of my country.

As the meal was getting to its end, there came something which took me by surprise. Dr. Isaac stood up and, addressing the pupils, informed them about my presence as a guest, asking me at the same time to say a few words as to the motive for my coming. I got up in turn, rather shyly, and so taken aback that I just managed to utter a very short and very poor little speech. However, it was indeed with regret that I took leave of my hosts an hour later.

The rest of my stay in Abergavenny was marked by two more outstanding features. One of these concerns the most enjoyable evening passed on the eve of my departure at the home of Mr. William Powell, an evening which I shall never forget and where the staunch bonds of friendship were tied. The other event is related to my departure, when, while I was waiting at the station at 6 a.m. for the train which was to take me towards Newport, one of the influential members of the K.H.G.S. board (whose name I will not mention in order to safeguard his modesty) came to bid me farewell, and this in spite of the very early hour and most dreadful weather. This I shall never forget, either, as I have never been treated with such kindness and consideration.

Thanks to the very hearty welcome I met on all sides, my "Sentimental Journey" was a success which outdid the best of my expectations. So, one may easily understand that, as the train moved out, I felt very grateful towards all those people who had contributed to make my stay so enjoyable, just as I felt a little sad when realizing that the enchantment had now come to an end.

Looking out of the carriage window, I took a last look at the town and at the Bloronge and I hopefully said "Au revoir".

My story would have ended here, had not my renewed relations with the K.H.G.S. been crowned after I got back home. Great was my elation indeed when the mail brought me a large envelope containing a letter from Mr. Richard Downes, Honorary Secretary of the K.H.G.S. Old Boys' Association stating that the committee had enrolled me as a Life Member of the Association. Annexed were my membership card and a blazer badge. In order to give a little in return for what I received on that trip I made it a point to write these few lines to be published, if possible, in the next issue of the "Gobannian" so as to assure all the members of the K.H.G.S. Old Boys' Association, past and present, that the man who once was the little Belgian boy, refugee of the First World War, had left large pieces of his heart and soul among them

By **Marcel Mostade** (20, rue des Shardons Brussels 3.)

## GWENT RECORD OFFICE

### TEMPORARY CLOSURE

The Gwent Record Office will close at 4 p.m. on Friday 29<sup>th</sup> July. It will reopen in its new location in Ebbw Vale in October 2011.

We apologise for any inconvenience and thank you for your patience. We look forward to welcoming you to the new Gwent Archives.



For more information about the new office and our services, please see our website:

[www.gwentarchives.gov.uk](http://www.gwentarchives.gov.uk)

[www.archifaugwent.gov.uk](http://www.archifaugwent.gov.uk)

Tel: 01633 644886

Email: [gwent.records@torfaen.gov.uk](mailto:gwent.records@torfaen.gov.uk)

## **Chairman's Report 2010-2011**

It's a steep learning curve taking over from a chairman who has worked with the society for so long. My greatest thanks, therefore, go to all of the committee who have provided so much support.

Our new treasurer, Oliver Russell, has battled manfully with the transfer of signatories to the society accounts, requiring many letters and visits to inefficient banks. He provides the committee with clear monthly accounts. The Trustees (committee members) have considered the internal and external financial and other risks to the charity and have adopted guidance notes from the treasurer for the clear accountability of all monetary transactions. The risk management strategy will be reviewed periodically.

Helen Morgan, as the new secretary, has provided the Focus monthly magazine with an enticing preview of the next activity for members of the society and has given the committee succinct minutes. It has proved more difficult to promote our activities in the Abergavenny Chronicle, due to the pressure on their news content by commercial considerations.

Marian Senior and Dai Morgan have found some outstanding lecturers during the year. You will see from your membership cards that they have an interesting lecture programme for 2011-2012 and they are already tackling the following year. Having to use the Ballroom at the Angel because of an omission of the pantomime on the Borough Theatre booking list made us even more thankful for the excellent facilities in the Borough Theatre. We also have good support here from the technical staff, Ioan and Andrew, for which Ken Key and I operating the audio-visual aids are often thankful. Jane White and Jeanette Butt continue to provide Fairtrade tea and coffee after lectures and Jane and Ioan have ensured that our fire evacuation procedures are up to scratch. Thank you also to all our volunteer fire stewards.

You will have seen Paddy Beynon on the desk in the foyer, selling DVDs and books, and arranging the sponsorship for the floodlighting. She and her helpers also maintain the Victorian Garden at the Castle. The floodlighting will be switched off from May to September as the light evenings prevent the viewing of a floodlit castle and it will save electricity. At a Museum meeting with representatives from CADW, the security firm and other interested parties, Ken Key and I discussed adding additional lights. A report on security

measures to prevent vandalism at the Castle is awaited, but there is no suitable position for a further floodlight on this listed site.

Sue Smith continues as a tower of strength on the committee and, as the Membership Secretary, she sorts everything out very calmly, keeping our 389 members informed by email and post. She has also taken on the role of research co-ordinator for the investigation of historic events at the Castle, helped by a few stalwart volunteers.

How John Skinner continues to find so many fascinating places for the visits programme is a mystery. They are, as you know, all planned meticulously and he has the advantage of a superb lieutenant, Margot Seabourne, who has the onerous job of managing the finances and juggling the lists of those going on the visits, with many withdrawals and replacements.

Rachael Rogers keeps the committee up-to-date with what is happening at Abergavenny Museum. It is important to remember that the society originated as a group who started the Museum and went on to found Abergavenny Local History Society when the Museum was transferred to the Town Council. The listening post provided by the society has been used for the temporary exhibitions and we are hoping to provide material for a viewing screen in the future. The society also gave a grant towards reviewing the schools programme. Some lively new activities for schools have been introduced, as well as excellent backpacks for children to explore independently in the Castle grounds.

We are sorry to lose David and Barbara Powell from the committee and we give them our heartfelt thanks for all they have done. They were a hard act to follow when they handed over the responsibilities for the lecture programme and they have been a source of quiet wisdom on the committee. Barbara is going out with a fling, arranging a social outing to Tretower on June 19<sup>th</sup>.

I want to give a big thank you to all the walks and town tour leaders last year. We led four well attended walks for the Brecon Beacons Park Authority, continued the monthly Market Tours with diminishing numbers until September, had two evening walks and a walk for a Women's Institute. We were over-extended and will need to recoup our energies with a smaller programme this summer.

Helen Morgan and I represented the society at the

Abergavenny Eisteddfod and the society donated one of the prizes in an excellent programme of finalists. The society gave an award to Garth Minton who goes on from King Henry VIII<sup>th</sup> School to study modern history. A display for the Food Festival on the theme of crafts through the ages was kindly hosted by the United Reformed Church. I ran a seminar on interesting historical landmarks to the local taxi drivers as part of a tourist promotion activity by the Brecon Beacons National Park.

We have set up a new website [www.abergavennylocalhistorysociety.org.uk](http://www.abergavennylocalhistorysociety.org.uk) to cope with the amount of factual information about the society that is now required and to separate it from historical information about Abergavenny. The newsletters from past years are almost all now available and make fascinating reading. Ken Key and Sue Smith work very hard on the newsletters, and are appealing for more material to be sent in to Ken as soon as possible to make this year's edition just as good.

The children's plaques project is now complete with the printing of the Trails & Tales leaflet taking families around the pictorial plaques. Leaflets are available from the Tourist Information Centre and other outlets free of charge. The "Walk Around Abergavenny" leaflet was revised and reprinted; an insert was added this year to include recent additions.

Several publications are in the pipeline for the future, including new souvenir guides for the Castle and the Museum, and a couple of historical books or booklets. We are also hoping to increase the availability of the Walking through History routes using modern technology such as downloadable material from the website or to mobile phones. More about these, next year!

**Gill Wakley Chairman May 2011**

## **CASTLE RESEARCH GROUP**

Abergavenny Museum is planning a new booklet on the Castle and Museum. The Museum archives contain surprisingly little information on the Castle between the building of the Museum, originally a hunting lodge, in 1818, and 1950. Curator Rachael Rogers is hoping this can be remedied. ALHS members who responded to the appeal for volunteers - Christina Lawrence, Elizabeth Dunkley and Lavinia O'Brien are currently looking through the Abergavenny Chronicle archives in order to fill some of the gaps in the Castle's history and have already covered more than 20 years. A big thank you is due to them for undertaking this enormous task.

While it's possible to look through quite a lot of newspapers with little or no information turning up, some fascinating details *are* coming to light. An item from 1891 describes one of the entertainments at the Castle - a Mr Parker, the 'Celebrated Trick Back-and-Forward Jumper' who "jumped over a five feet bar with his ankles tied together, cleared forty feet in three bounds and wound up by jumping over the back of a horse ... the jumper standing on a brick to take his leap."

Another item shows that things never change. Shortly after the Castle opened to the public in 1881 it was reported in the Chronicle that the Improvements Committee had decided to put up signs asking the public to desist from carving their initials in the woodwork or damaging plants and trees. Sadly an occurrence of this kind had recently been reported, this time in the Western Mail, when Arthur Pritchard and Walter Sheen, "two little lads", were charged with damaging the Castle walls to the value of 1d. (The defendants promised not to offend again and were ordered to pay expenses.)

If you have any memories or photos of the Castle pre-1950 and would be prepared to share them, or if you can help with the research, please let Sue Smith know (contact details in your membership card) or email [alhs@live.co.uk](mailto:alhs@live.co.uk).

**Susan Smith**

## REFLECTIONS

Our Society's chairman, Dr Gill Wakley, wondered in her recent AGM report how it was possible to find so many interesting places for members to visit. In truth we have so far merely scratched the surface, since our country, even those parts of our country near enough to visit easily and economically, proudly offers an inexhaustible reservoir of really interesting places. During nine years of organising trips, it is evident that this Great British reservoir can never dry up. We are most fortunate to have innumerable, such well-tended and preserved treasures: ancient sites, cathedrals, churches, castles, mansions, gardens, museums, etc. Looking back, it is often difficult to remember the salient features of architecture, construction, furnishings, fittings and so forth which distinguish one treasured place from another. We are grateful for the brochures, books and picture postcards that remind us not only of these visible features, but also of the hordes of people, of which only a famous few have known names and portraits, whose ingenuity and rank hard labour -to say the very least -gave us a material heritage of perhaps unique surviving proportions in this part of the world. They have also given us a material heritage around which our long history is woven and can be brought to life. For all these reasons and more, we are thankful and our appreciation is reflected, in part, by belonging to a history society as well as sharing and enjoying its activities.

When recalling places visited, possibly castles initially spring to mind. Many are large and imposing. Yet sadly, like abbeys, priories and monasteries, too many are now just ruins. Those that remain in good nick, largely through the good offices of admirable heritage bodies, cannot fail to impress.



HADRIAN'S WALL (MS)

Then there is Hadrian's Wall with its staggered fortifications, encampments and settlements. That was an unforgettable tour. But what about all those glorious mansions, gardens, museums? What about all those artefacts collected by one person, sometimes a bit of an oddity, that are still on show in perfect order and which we find so fascinating when we visit his or her home? You will have your own favourites; mine are resplendent cathedrals and ancient, simple churches. Of all the resplendent cathedrals we have toured together, for me three stand out.

The mighty robustness of Durham. The delicacy of Ely, its octagonal lantern positioned so high above the transept crossing soon after the central tower collapsed in 1322.



ELY (MS)



DURHAM (MS)

First and foremost, Canterbury, our oldest cathedral and by dint of extensive later additions the largest, and in my view the grandest, in Britain. We shall return there this summer.

We have been to quite a few ancient and simple churches. Over the ages, Modernisers have deprived most of the oldest of their simplicity. For a truly unadulterated Saxon interior complete with its Saxon tower and externally accessed crypt, Duntisbourne Rous Church is notable -even though the coach barely squeezed its expertly driven way along the narrowest of Cotswold meandering lanes and found a means of turning round, unscathed. Alan Stead and Golden Pioneer serve us commendably.

**John Skinner**

## Y GRAIG - A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

An abandoned and ruined village will always attract rumours and myths to explain the departure of the occupants and Y Graig is no exception. But in this case the stories could be distracting from the real historical significance of Y Graig as one of the most recently deserted villages in the UK.

In the 2009 Summer Newsletter Ken Key wrote about the abandoned village of Y Graig at Llanwenarth Citra following its inclusion on the Abandoned Communities website. ([www.abandonedcommunities.co.uk](http://www.abandonedcommunities.co.uk)).

It appeared that the most probable time for the village to have been abandoned was following the 1842 tithe agreement when villagers had to pay their tithes in cash rather than in kind and were unable to find the money. The essay Katherine Jones wrote in 1933 told a story of villagers having their goats and donkeys sold to pay arrears of rent, being driven from their homes and the houses made uninhabitable. Unfortunately no documentary evidence has been found to date to back up these stories. However there is some evidence that shows more about the village and its inhabitants.

Y Graig has Cadw scheduling (F.Foster/RCAHMW 21.08.2007) and the information on the Coflein website ([www.coflein.gov.uk/en/site/276007/details/THE+GRAIG+SETTLEMENT/](http://www.coflein.gov.uk/en/site/276007/details/THE+GRAIG+SETTLEMENT/)) says "The Graig settlement is a deserted post-medieval village, occupied from at least the first half of the 18th. century through until the beginning of the 20th. century. The settlement comprises the ruins of at least 25 individual dwelling houses, many with additional outhouses, outside lavatories, animal enclosures and other pens." The *Forest Enterprise Archaeological Survey 1996* (CPAT Report 191) describes seventeen ruined buildings and a number of other structures dating from the late 17th.Century onwards. In her unpublished report Caroline Earwood (*The Graig, Description and History*, 1999) ties up these ruins with the holdings shown on the tithe map. This would indicate that at least half the village was abandoned before 1842. She also ties up the property owners shown on tithe apportionment with the households in the 1841 Census and this shows a population of roughly 35 people. It is possible that there other people were actually occupying some of the outbuildings because by 1851 Y Graig appears to have a population of nearer 80, with 42 of them associated with the original tithe properties. Throughout the period of the Censuses many people rented property in Y Graig and worked elsewhere in a variety of occupations. Because of the difficulty in identifying individual properties on the censuses the figures will unfortunately have to be approximate but the total population of Y Graig remains at 70-80 to the end of the century while the original householders dwindle to 2 in 1891. In the 1901 and 1911 Censuses total numbers are down to 30-40.

It is possible to trace some of the families in the seven 1842 tithe map properties through the Censuses. For example in 1841 Christopher and Eliza Williams were living on their property, including an orchard and arable land, with their daughter Eliza and a servant Emely Watkins (another daughter Emily appears to be missing from this Census). Christopher Williams was an agricultural labourer and later a wood cutter. Over the next 20 years the servant disappeared and more children arrived - Caroline, Mary, John, and Edwin. By 1871 Christopher had died and Eliza was getting a living as a market gardener and also

looking after a three year old child. Her daughter Eliza and son Edwin were still living at home. By 1881 Edwin had gone and the younger Eliza, now Eliza Follett, had married, been widowed and returned to her mother's home. The older Eliza is listed as a farmer and the younger as having no occupation but they were looking after a grandchild, Edith. In 1891 the older Eliza was dead and the younger was living as a farmer with her niece Edith. Eliza Follett died in 1894 and Edith left the village before 1901. It's not possible to identify the property in the 1901 census so we don't know if it was still occupied or had been abandoned.

The parish records for Llanwenarth Citra show many records for parishioners living on Y Graig over the following 30-40 years and baptisms are recorded to 1947 with up to 40 families represented over the period. The electoral roll in 1918 gives names of 30 or more people with Y Graig addresses, with very similar numbers in 1928 and 1938. So there was flourishing population on the Graig hillside well into the 20th Century. Katherine Jones writes that there is only one freehold property left on Y Graig in 1933 and that is occupied by Mrs Arnold. But what she doesn't say is that Mrs Arnold must have had some neighbours who lived in rented property.

We still have to answer the question of why the village was abandoned. According to Caroline Earwood the part of the village which was abandoned first was the western end, nearest the quarries. It is possible that the houses there were associated with quarry workers and they were not needed when the quarries went out of regular use. So far, it has not been possible to find evidence to date this event and anyway the quarries and lime pit would probably have been used unofficially by the local farmers for many years after they had closed. The Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal was initially built for the distribution of lime to the fields. It could have been that the quarries the other side of the River Usk were better placed for getting lime to the canal so it is possible that the Graig quarries went into disuse at this time.

The population of Y Graig dwindled in the 20th Century but this may simply have been because there was more housing available in Abergavenny than previously and people didn't need to live on a steep hillside. Also the condition of the housing may have been deteriorating. With no family connections the area would have been less appealing to people looking for rented accommodation. More investigation will hopefully provide some evidence.

Finally, there is the question of the most recent occupation of Y Graig. It has been said that there were people still living there in the 1960s. There are people in Llanwenarth Citra who can remember going to the local school before WWII. Maybe some of them have memories of going to Y Graig or have photographs?

If you have memories, documents or photographs and are prepared to share them then please contact Sue Smith (contact details on your membership card) or email [alhs@live.co.uk](mailto:alhs@live.co.uk).

**SUSAN SMITH**

### LOOK UP AND REMEMBER

The *first* series of nine blue plaques put up by the society have been expertly refurbished by Dave Newman of Newman's Property Services after a long search for a suitable craftsman by the committee. The plaques were becoming extremely shabby, especially the one on St John's Church (now the Freemason's Temple), which has not deteriorated much since 2003. The one in Monk Street was particularly bad and not a good advertisement for the town's history



2003 (KAK)



2010 (GW)



2011 (KAK)



A subcommittee of the society (Bill Farley, Peter Campbell, John Cook, Arthur Hinshelwood and Gwyn Jones) was set up in 1981 and the first nine plaques put up over the next few years. They mark the medieval town gates and the oldest remaining inns and houses. You might take a short walk around these blue plaques starting with Tan House in Mill Street, take in Gunter House and the site of the medieval South Gate on the Coach and Horses as you walk up Cross Street, then turn right at the right-angled bend in the A40 to crane your neck up to view the one marking the East Gate along Monk Street. Crossing over Monk Street - with care - continue up Cross Street passing some of the *second* series blue plaques on the Angel Hotel and further up on the Market Hall. At High Cross and Market Street (*second* series plaques), turn left into Flannel Street so that you don't miss the decorative ceramic plaque in Flannel Street with another *second* series blue plaque above. Turn right at the top past the Hen and Chickens Pub and turn right again to find the *first* series blue plaque on the left of the door into St John's Church, and the fine stone children's plaque low down on the right hand side.

Walk to the High Street, turn left, and almost at the end find the blue plaque on the HSBC bank - the medieval North Gate. Retrace your steps into Nevill Street, where you will find the interesting ceramic children's plaque and a *second* series blue plaque here on the wig makers, and another opposite on the Georgian house. The blue plaque on the Trading Post (the Vaughan's town house) is *first* series, as is the one on the Bull Inn (the Post Office) near the lovely ceramic plaques depicting the market activities. Finally cross the road by the King's Arms to the West Gate for another *first* series blue plaque and the bonus of a decorative ceramic plaque illustrating the activities at this medieval gateway leading into town from the Grofields and Castle Meadows direction. The leaflet containing the walk around the *new decorative* plaques is available from the Tourist Information Centre, the Museum and other outlets. Two walks around these will be held on Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> July and 25<sup>th</sup> August starting from the Tourist Information Centre at 2pm. Other walks can be found on the website:

[www.abergavennylocalhistorysociety.org.uk](http://www.abergavennylocalhistorysociety.org.uk)

**Gill Wakley**