

FOREST OF DEAN LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

news
May 2016

- Take in a Pill! - Join our summer excursion to discover 'Aspects of Wood'. Booking forms inside.....
- Also inside 'Nelson's Oaks' and 'Water in Mines'

Nelson's Oaks *by Averil Kear*



Rear Admiral Sir Horatio Nelson
1758 -1805
Painted by Lemuel Francis Abbot

During the 18th century Dean oak was regarded as the highest quality timber for shipbuilding. The keel of HMS Victory was laid down in Chatham on 23rd July 1759 using approximately 6,000 trees 90 per cent of which were oaks probably from the Forest of Dean. She was launched on 7th May 1765 but was not commissioned until 1778. This long period of weathering meant that the hull timbers were well seasoned, which is probably the main reason why she has survived so long. The Forest of Dean only supplied a small proportion of the navy's total annual requirement but between 1761 and 1786 some 17,000 loads of oak were sent from the Forest of Dean to naval dockyards at Plymouth Deptford and Woolwich raising a sum of £31,723 for the Crown. In 1788 a survey of the management of Forest woodland recommended inclosure up to the statutory 11,000 acres as the ever-increasing demand for timber for shipbuilding grew.

The Napoleonic wars brought an even greater requirement for ship timber and in 1802 Lord Nelson visited the Forest of Dean and reported his concern about the lack of available oak and the fact that no new trees were being planted. Part of a statement about his visit to the Forest says: *'Nothing in it can grow self-sown, for the deer bark all the young trees. Vast droves of hogs are allowed to go into the woods in the autumn, and if any fortunate acorn escapes their search, and takes root, then flocks of sheep are allowed to go into the Forest, and they bite off the tender shoot'*

Nelson's report written in 1803 indicated that if the Forest was managed properly it had the capability of producing 920,000 oaks, which would produce 9,200 loads of ship timber every year. In 1803 he asserted that less than 3,500 loads of timber were available. To build just one first-rate warship it required felling trees over 100 acres of Forest. In 1808 the Dean Forest (Timber) Act was passed which provided the powers needed to complete the enclosure of the complete 11,000 acres. Thousands of acorns were planted, which today give the Forest of Dean the largest area of oak trees over 150 years old in Britain.

At the bicentennial of Nelson's famous victory at Trafalgar in 2005 it was decided that restoration work on HMS Victory should be completed to mark the event. The Royal Navy decided to use Dean Oak to refurbish her and on 19th May 2004 Lieutenant Commander Frank Nowosielski, the Commander of the Victory, came down to the Forest of Dean to take delivery of two oak trees to be used in the restoration work of HMS Victory, which can currently be viewed in Portsmouth Historic Dockyard.



*The Victory, Nelson's famous
flagship, in Portsmouth Harbour
in 1900*

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Editors Notes

The cover photograph is of Purton Pill. Purton has a long history, even being mentioned in the Domesday book. It was for a long time a minor port on the Severn, with timber and coal being shipped from the port. It was also the home of a ferry across the Severn, which connected with the other Purton on the east bank. A chantry chapel was founded in 1360, probably for people using the crossing. Travellers were later accommodated in a 'passage house inn'. Locals with a reasonable memory will know the 'passage house inn' as the former Severn View Hotel, where a beverage or two could be taken whilst taking in the superb views over the river estuary. In 1832 plans were made to build a railway (The Purton Steam Carriage Road) from the Blackpool Bridge area of the Forest to Purton. Only parts of this railway were built, including the rather forlorn Grade II listed three arch viaduct which still survives (just) at Purton. River trade from Purton was impacted by the opening of Lydney Docks in 1813, and by the building of the South Wales Railway in 1852. The fate of the ferry crossing was sealed when the Severn Railway Bridge was opened in 1879.

Cecile and Averil's tour on 20th August (Aspects of Wood) may or may not include a visit to Purton Pill (an element of surprise has to be maintained!). You can visit the place yourself, there is limited parking, and access to the slipway is still possible. Take care at times of high spring tides however!

We have a diverse range of feature articles this month, Averil Kear tells the story of 'Nelson's Oaks', and Cecile Hunt reveals the difficulties that miners had dealing with water permeating their mines. Anne Childs, long standing member and former committee member, introduces us to Coleford citizen Iris Moodie who recently celebrated her 100th birthday, and who shares her interesting life story with us.

The centre pages of this newsletter are reserved for any member who has a story to tell. Your contributions are always welcome!

Keith Walker

Short pieces of news, views, and opinions for the Newsletter are always very welcome. Every effort will be made to reproduce articles as presented but the Editor reserves the right to edit as necessary. The Editor will assume that all necessary authorisation for attachments, photographs etc has been obtained and the FODLHS will not be held liable in the case of a subsequent query.

News From The Chair with Simon Moore



Welcome to this edition of our regular newsletter and the start of our summer programme of meetings and activities. A special welcome to our new members, we trust you will enjoy the meetings, publications and support for your researches that we offer, and we hope that at least some of you will step forward to join us on the management committee and take an active part in running the society.

With the last of our indoor meetings for this part of the year over, we now move to our summer programme which is packed with guided local walks and visits.

We have recently added some more walks to our programme, which are outlined later. Please show your support by coming along to as many of our events as you can. I would particularly bring your attention to the visit to Clifton, Bristol, that Cecile is organising for Saturday 11th June, this will be a get-yourself-there event with various tours and things to see arranged for us; if you would like to come but don't have transport, please contact either Cecile or myself and we will see if we can arrange a lift for you; conversely if you are going and have a spare seat in your car let us know! The other event I would urge you to support is the coach tour in August. These local Forest tours have become a fixture on our programme and are always popular, so book early to avoid disappointment; they are very well put together, packed with interesting places to see and with well researched commentary on local history. Thanks to Averil and Cecile for taking this on for another year.

I note from my badge that as well as the Chair I am also the Conservation Officer for the Society, a role which I feel has been on the back burner recently, as the Foresters Forest project takes over. I sat on a small panel recently that looked at and reviewed the results of the request for people to submit photographs of places, remains or buildings that people felt were at risk, important or otherwise in need of conservation...disappointingly we were not swamped with stuff but some interesting projects may come from it. I am here to help and if you are concerned about a structure, would like advice about appropriate repairs or help in getting a building researched, protected or simply brought to the attention of an Authority, then please do get in touch.

We are sorry to announce that David Edwards, our Secretary, has stepped down from the committee for personal reasons. We thank him for his time and commitment and send him good wishes for the future. Which brings me back to my soap-box, we now have over 300 paid up members, who bring a huge cross section of skills, knowledge and experience.....sounds familiar? We would love to hear from some of you to help with the meetings and sitting on the main management committee. The AGM in October is rapidly approaching, when a number of our existing members will be stepping down, or looking to reduce their commitment after many years of service to the Society; we need to replace them. We are particularly looking for somebody with IT skills and somebody to help Sue Gordon-Smith with publications.

Thank you for your continuing support.

Simon Moore



From the Membership Secretary

The Society offers a warm welcome to the following new members: Linda Hopkins, Ladi Broadman, Roger and Veronica Coe, Angela Flynn, Karen and Andy Lougher, Mervyn Greening, Mike and Maureen Goff, and Mary and David Slinger.

We hope you very much enjoy the benefits the Society offers.

We now have well over 300 members, and this quarterly newsletter goes out to some 230 addresses, which are very healthy numbers. We also continue to have excellent attendances at our events. But all these goodies - like talks and outings and the newsletter and *New Regard* and keeping the website up-to-date, and getting listing for road markers etc - don't just magically happen!

So, once again, I would like to make an appeal on behalf of your Committee for some members to step forward and see if you would be interested in helping to run your Society. We offer a 'free trial, no obligation' approach - come along to a meeting or two and see what happens before making any commitment. And don't feel you have to be an expert on the history of the Forest before you can join the Committee. Actually, as I found out, it's a great way to learn about the Forest. What we need are people who are happy to get involved and to use their skills on the Society's behalf.

Please call me on 01594 510533 or any of the Committee members (details on the membership card and in this newsletter), or drop us an email. We'd love to hear from you.

Cheryl Mayo (membership@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk)

MORE DETAIL ON PROGRAMME WALKS

Sunday 8th May 2.30 pm

A Walk around Lower Lydbrook and English Bicknor, led by Geoff Davis

Please note the following meeting point details are slightly different from those on your membership card;

From the Forest, drive through Lydbrook on the B4234. At the T-junction, turn left onto the Stowfield Rd (signposted English Bicknor, Christchurch, Coleford). Drive for 900 metres to the left turn to Upper Stowfield. Park opposite the bus stop on the old section of road.



This is a 3.5 miles circular walk expected to last about 2 to 2.5 hours, from Lower Lydbrook to English Bicknor and back. The walk looks at the war effort at Stowfield with the Temco factory and the cable works. It continues down the river bank then turns up towards Offa's Dyke to look down over the site of the Handley Page Halifax crash of 7th June 1942. The crash occurred during a top secret mission which meant that few people know about it. The walk then continues to English Bicknor passing the Lime Kilns on Rosemary Topping then Bicknor Court. A visit is made to St Mary's church and churchyard to view the war memorial and unusual war grave. Finally we return to Stowfield through open fields, passing the home of a WW1 war hero and an unsung hero from WWII. The walk includes steep hills and stiles, so ensure you wear suitable footwear.

Sunday 10 July 2.00 pm

A Walk around Pillowell, led by Steve Cooper

Meet at Yorkley Village Hall 2.00 pm

The walk, which is about 1.5 miles and will last about 2 hours, will be a mix of local history and F W Harvey connections. It will include a visit to Pillowell Methodist Church to see the various memorials and other objects.

The time and meeting place for this walk aren't in the membership card, so please note them here.

OTHER WALKS

Beachley Then and Now Tuesday 19th July 2016 7pm

An evening walking tour and history of this tucked away community not so very far from the Forest, has been organised especially for our Society's members. ***Please note you need to book for this one.*** Carol and Richard Clammer of the Tidenham Historical Group will lead members on a walk lasting between 1 and 1.5 hours around the Beachley Peninsular, which has many fascinating aspects of history, some previously hidden, from the 7th to the 20th century. This area, which today looks largely benign and rural, has been the subject of years of quiet research by various members of the Tidenham Historical Group. Carol and Richard will share the group's research on aspects of social and industrial history, including the turmoil created by the evacuation of the area during the First World War.

Meet at the Old Ferry Inn car park (Sat Nav: NP16 7HH) at Beachley Point at 7pm. For further details and to book a place please contact Carol/Richard on 01291 623736, or call/email Cheryl Mayo on 01594 510 533 (membership@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk).

Walking for Health history-related walks

Walking for Health in the Forest of Dean has organised a programme of one-off walks for 2016, some of which are history-related. The details, with contacts (you can also just turn up), are:

Sunday 5th June 2 pm, from the Nags Head Pub, Oldcroft GL15 4RX.

A 1.5 hr walk exploring the history of Oldcroft. Some hills.

Contact Averil Kear 01594 562096.

Thursday 23rd June 10.45 for 11.00 start, from the Lower Wireworks free car park (take road opposite Abbey Mill by the Royal George, car park up on right).

The Angiddy Trail, from Tintern exploring the archaeological remains of the wireworks industry. Circular 5 mile walk along muddy and uneven paths with some short steep stretches. Bring a picnic lunch to eat on the way.

Contact Val Dempsey 01594 562468 v.dempsey@btinternet.com

For the full 2016 programme of special walks and also details of regular walks, go to the *Walking for Health* website at <https://www.walkingforhealth.org.uk/walkfinder/forest-dean-walking-for-health> or call Kim Spencer on 01594 562240.

Iris Moodie - A Life Long Lived! by Anne Childs

A notable milestone in the life of Coleford resident Iris Moodie is celebrated here by long standing member Anne Childs, as she discusses with Iris her long and full life.

April 2nd 2016 was a special day for Mrs Iris Moodie as she celebrated her 100th birthday. Iris was born at Brook House, Water Lane, Brislington, near Bristol, which then was just a small village. Iris's mother, Elsie Victoria Eason, came from the Wiltshire village of Sherstone where her parents were yeoman farmers. Her father, Ernest Thompson, grew up on Squire Irdel's estate, where his father was head gardener. In time Ernest joined the Great Western Railway and eventually became a railway crossing inspector. Some of Iris's earliest memories are of attending dancing lessons at the age of 4 and walking to the village Church of England School where Miss Lugg was the infant teacher. Each Ash Wednesday the whole school walked to church for the special service. Later Iris recalled seeing a stationery train packed with soldiers and Miss Lugg handing them baskets of fruit.

Later Iris's family moved to St .Anne's, Brislington. Iris's mother made dresses, coats, with ornate matching hats. Animals were part of the family; rabbits, guinea pigs, a tortoise and a goat which would eat anything including the washing on the line. Christmases were looked forward to, but before then the family always enjoyed a goose each Michaelmas. Normally a large chicken was the centre piece for Christmas dinner. A real fir tree was brought in to the house and decorated, paper-chains were made and glued together. Iris was given small presents but far fewer than today's children; her mother Else loved giving parties with lots of dancing and games.

Iris had her share of childhood illnesses including measles. At this time her fair hair was long and had become full of knots; granny came to the rescue, very gently combing the long hair with Vaseline to get the knots out. The family went to morning service on Sundays and later Iris went to afternoon service with a mixed social time afterwards. Sometimes the family were invited by the vicar (who was a bachelor) for afternoon tea.

Later Iris went to senior school in Bristol where navy blue gym slips were the order of the day and she really enjoyed English lessons. From there she went to a commercial College in Park Street Bristol. Her first job was at The Guardian Insurance Company situated in Small Street Bristol. Iris recalled that a week's pay was around 15 shillings, now 75p, and from this she had to make a contribution towards the cost of household expenses and buy her own lunches. Father helped her by paying for the railway season ticket. Some mornings if she was late the porters would keep a



door open while she ran over the bridge and the driver would toot the engine whistle. Trams run by the Bristol tramway company were the main way of getting around. Iris loved riding on the top deck, and the tram depot was called The Centre, where there was a large clock. "Meet me under the clock" was an often heard remark. This is what Iris and a friend did with two young men who had asked them out. However after the first outing the girls swapped over and Iris went out with Bill Moodie, her future husband. He was an insurance clerk who later became an insurance inspector. They went to the cinema a lot and enjoyed walking in the Mendips, sometimes calling in at a farm houses for a simple tea with boiled eggs. During 1938 they became engaged and Bill joined the Territorial Army Reserve. War was declared on 3rd September 1939, by now Iris was working in the typing pool at Bristol Air Craft Company at Filton where the typists were kept in order by Miss Shield. When Iris and Bill married in December she came to their wedding and gave them a set of port crystal glasses. They borrowed a car for a few days exploring the Mendips, staying in a very cold comfortless farm house.

The couple started married life staying in turn with both sets of parents until a bomb blast lifted the roof and blew the windows out of the bungalow belonging to Iris's parents and they decided to move to Cheddar. Baby Ian was born in 1942 when Bill was drafted into the North Africa Campaign. Iris had found a couple of rooms in a very large house, the kitchen had ancient gas stove, no bathroom, electricity only downstairs and Ian was taken to bed by candle light. It was so cold that Iris would make up a bottle and tuck it under her nighty to keep warm. The owners of the house kept Orpington Buff chickens and never once offered to let Iris buy one egg for the baby. Later Iris found better accommodation in a flat overlooking the square in Cheddar next to the Cinema and watched the coming and goings in the town. Even so the cream small wheeled Mubtly pram had to live at the bottom of the stairs. Ian was entered in a bonny baby competition and became the winner of a £1 war bond. When Bill returned home they moved to Plymouth during 1947, which was a bitter winter. A second son Simon was born and on the nurse's advice the baby was wrapped up and put out in his pram in the snow! Because of Bill's business, the family moved on to Newcastle where Rebecca was born, then to Birmingham where Iris worked for Newels Zip Company, tackling huge piles of filing that had accumulated.

During 1968 Iris and Rebecca boarded the Empress of Canada to visit son Ian who was living in Montreal; Iris didn't like the city very much with its very French connections, but thought the six day voyage each way wonderful holidays in themselves.

Following the deaths of Bill and son Simon, Iris decided to move to Coleford in 2006 to be nearer her family.

What age in your mind are you Iris, I asked? "Only in my fifties", and your recipe for life? "Don't smoke, not too much alcohol, enjoy good food, company, live sensibly".



The Tramways Centre in Bristol. Several different tram lines met at St Augustine's Parade and Broad Quay. The site is still known as 'The Centre' today. Note the clock on the offices of the Bristol Tramway Company.



Water Lane, Brislington, circa 1910.

*Photo courtesy of Paul Townsend
https://www.flickr.com/photos/brizzlebo_rmandbred*

News from the GLHA Forum



Representatives from about 30 local history groups attended the recent meeting at Gloucester Archives.

We were firstly treated to a presentation by Bob Parker and Cyril Smith about the **Gloucestershire Constabulary Archive**. The Gloucestershire Police force was formed in 1839 and was the second oldest county force – by 6 days. There have been 14 chief Constables (cc) to date. The current Chief Constable is the first woman to hold the position. The first few

women police officers were appointed in 1919, but only to undertake office work and deal with women and children. By 1950 the Force had only 10 women. Since 1976 there has been no difference in the treatment of men and women officers. In the early days policemen were told in Orders from the top exactly how to behave both at work and in their private life, for example 40 were sacked for drinking off duty. They had to walk to all their duties, even when escorting prisoners to houses of correction on foot. Only in the 1860s were the first bicycles introduced, although the Superintendent had a pony and trap. By 1948 the force had a fleet of patrol cars. Communications advanced slowly too. Written orders began to give way to telephony. But until the 1940s policemen had to stand by a phone box for 10 minutes every hour. VHF radio was followed by telex, and personal radios. In 1992 a command and control network was introduced to log all incidents etc. Only recently have Blackberry smartphones and use of digital data become commonplace. The Constabulary Archive group has a wealth of records both photographic and written. All of these will be absorbed into the new Digital Hub at Gloucestershire Archives as it develops over the next 2 years. Local history groups were requested to offer copies of any police related material to the constabulary archives for incorporation.

The second presentation was about the **Know Your Place** project. This aims to make available a full selection of old and modern maps of all of the West Country. Maps for Bristol and South Gloucestershire are now available online, and the rest of Gloucestershire should go live later in 2016. You will be able to see their outputs at www.kypwest.org.uk. Once live, community members are asked to upload pictures or information about places on the maps which will become publicly available. This may be relevant to the current Foresters Forest project as it progresses.



Other GLHA news:

This year's **Summer Afternoon** will be hosted by Chipping Camden society on Saturday 16th July. Booking forms are available to download from: http://www.gloshistory.org.uk/glha_rm_campden_20160716.pdf

The next **Local History Day** will be held on 18th March 2017 at the Churchdown Community hall. The theme for the day will be Gardens for Food, Fun and Flowers.

The GLHA website (<http://www.gloshistory.org.uk/>) now has a 'Visits and Tours' list as well as the existing list of speakers.

Mary Sullivan, Vice Chair FDDLHS and GLHA rep

Water In Mines (not Gas!)

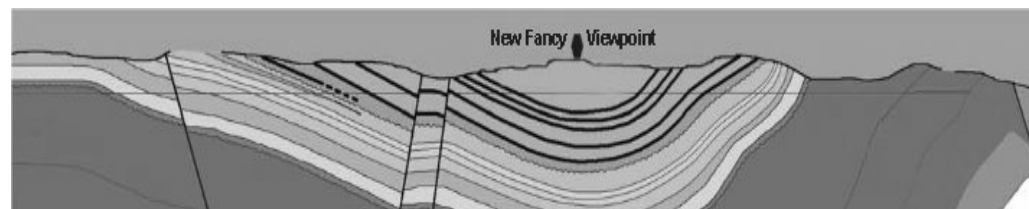
By Cecile Hunt

Canaries did not find work down any of the mines in the Forest of Dean as they did in other parts of the country.

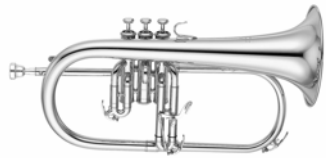
It has been said that water in the Forest mines stopped the coal being mined out completely many years ago. During World War One, when the peak of mining was reached, water was being pumped out at 10,000 gallons a minute by the deep pits of the time. It required, combined, 2,000 horse power to pump the water to a height greater than 800 feet. This volume of water was in addition to all the smaller pits also pumping water from shallower levels. To give an idea of why water is a problem in the extraction of Forest coal, take a look at the Coleford Highdelf seam; at one time around thirty mines worked this one seam alone; it follows the boundary of the Forest dipping inward to a basin shape, the centre of this basin is near or under the Speech House where it is 1300 ft below sea-level, so needed constant pumping to keep it clear of water.

Gales were drained by steam-engines, attempts were made by mine owners to reduce the use of pumping by 'waterproofing' beds of watercourses with conduits or channels to stop the water seeping down through the ground and adding to the water table. Cannop brook follows a strata with 25 small faults known as the Cannop fault belt; leakage into Cannop Colliery workings was in the main prevented by the natural covering of impervious clay deposits that cover some of the valley floor. But 600 yards of channelling had to be built by the Cannop Colliery using cast concrete and masonry conduits in the vicinity of the old Cannop Colliery site (now Peddle A Bike Away) - there used to be an inscription in the concrete conduit "Sept.1913". The three main brooks, Cinderford Brook, Blackpool Brook and Cannop Brook were all in places, at different times, 'waterproofed' with masonry channels, iron conduits and concrete. Blackpool Brook 'waterproofing' now leaks in places, caused by subsidence, above Blackpool Bridge in very dry periods all the water may be lost underground leaving the stream bed dry, springs at the bridge help to replenish the brook. Cinderford brook was 'channelled' with masonry up and down stream of where it passes under the B4227 in Ruspidge.

In addition to the conduits, channels and conduits of the brooks, streams were given stone-lined channels known as "trows" to protect iron mines below them. Look out for these half round troughs or gutters near Green Bottom pumping station; at the west end of Oakwood valley; and along the Westbury Brook, just to name a few places. The 'trows' and channels are still doing their jobs keeping water mainly on the surface although water is percolating into the old mine workings. On its way through mine workings it gets contaminated and becomes acid and ochreous; the best example of this is the fall out from the flooded Norchard colliery - it never stops flowing - you'll hear it before you see it!



Meetings In Review with John Powell and Cheryl Mayo



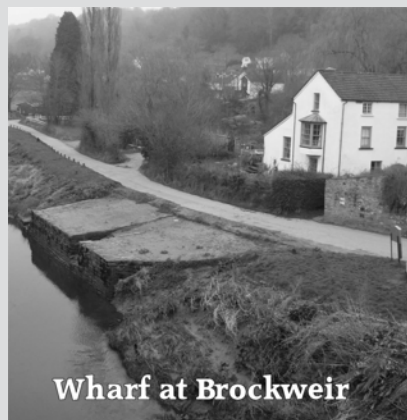
A large audience attended the meeting on **Saturday 13th February** to hear Roger Deeks talk about **“Tradition, Culture and Persistence of Brass Bands in the Forest of Dean”**.

Roger started by pointing out that before 1840 there was an increased presence of brass instruments in orchestral music. After

1840 new technology allowed the mass production of instruments which made them more affordable. Coupled with this there was a moral imperative to encourage people away from drink and towards ‘inoffensive’ social activities, such as brass bands. Employers were keen to encourage this, and often supported and encouraged their employees to join brass bands. After 1900 musicians were more likely to fund their own instruments and manage their bands independently. The style and type of instrument contained in a brass band is tightly defined through the rules of competition. Competitions are graded in sections, which reflect the competence of the bands playing in them. During competitions bands play test pieces and adjudicators make blind assessments of the music played to them. Roger then went on to give a pocket history of Forest brass bands, noting that many of the early bands were associated with collieries or specific industries. During the talk Becky Berrow of Forest of Dean Brass surprised the audience by getting a few notes out of a kettle and tube! She then went on to demonstrate how the introduction of valves allowed brass instruments such as the flugelhorn and trumpet to be more compact and to produce more notes than were possible from a simple horn. After the tea break Becky went on to perform a number of short pieces for the audience.

On **Saturday 12th March** a ‘full house’ enjoyed Heather Hurley’s talk on **“River Trade & Transport on the Wye and Lugg”**. Discord between mill owners and fishermen and those who sought to use the river to carry goods was a constant theme in the history of the River Wye. In 1695 an Act was passed to make the Rivers Wye and Lugg navigable. The river barges used on the river were known as ‘trows’ below Monmouth and simply barges above Monmouth. A typical barge in the eighteenth century could carry 20 tons of goods and had dimensions of 50 feet long and 11 feet wide. At first men towed barges upstream, with between 11 and 13 men needed to tow one barge. Subsequently after 1809, with the passing of the River Wye Horse Towing Act, horses were sometimes used to tow the barges, but a toll was payable, typically 6p per horse between Lydbrook and Hereford. Prior to the introduction of the railway system, a range of cargoes were carried on the river. Every Wye side town and village had its own quay. There were known wharves at Brockweir, Lydbrook, Bishopwood, Wilton Quay, Ross, Hoarwithy, Kings Caple, Fownhope, Mordiford, and Hereford which had nine or ten wharves on the River Wye. The coming of the railway had a devastating effect on the river borne trade and by 1855 the river trade on the upper Wye had virtually ceased.

Following the usual tea break Cecile Hunt presented a ‘quiz’, involving a series of photographs and images of well known and lesser known historic Forest personalities.



Wharf at Brockweir

On **Friday 18th March**, members and a number of visitors met at St Briavels Assembly Rooms for an evening talk titled **“Potter in Place”** by Jason Griffiths on famous Forest author and TV screen-writer, Dennis Potter. Jason’s focus was on how Potter’s relationship with his Forest home likely influenced his early career; especially in the context of his fellow Foresters’ reactions to his work, which placed them in the national limelight over several years.

Potter has been described as one of the most important writers for British television, and his output was both prolific and controversial. At the heart of much of this controversy was his frank analysis of the people and places of the Forest of Dean. Raised in Joyford, the son of a coalminer, Potter attended Bells Grammar School, finishing his schooling in London and then going on to Oxford. The great gap between his Oxford and home lives was a theme which he explored in his work with the BBC, honestly and openly, and not always to the delight of the Foresters. Much correspondence went on in the local papers, and Jason shared some of these gems with us. The highlight was his own story, written and acted by himself, ‘Between Two Rivers’ in 1960, which brought about a massive reaction with letters flowing from readers and Potter for some time. In 1987, Potter attributed this episode with influencing his decision to move from documentaries to drama as a ‘better way of getting at the truth’, although even then local voices were often raised against his work as being ‘an utter load of rubbish’ and even pornographic. Times and attitudes change and soften, however. Today, some 20 years after his death, Potter is a local hero, with a permanent exhibition dedicated to him at the Dean Heritage Centre, where his papers are also being archived.



Jason Griffiths

A splendid, informative hour-long talk **“Farming the Forest, the Peasants of West Gloucestershire 1200-1540”** was enjoyed by over 70 members and guests at the society’s meeting on **Saturday 9th April**. The speaker, Christopher Dyer, a Professor of History at the University of Leicester, was erudite and instructive but spoke with humour and obvious passion about a subject he has spent many years researching. He effectively and efficiently shone a bright light on the lives of the ordinary folk of the Forest who eked out a frugal living in their role as peasants. In the 14th century they numbered around two-thirds of the total population — around 5,000 in total. But Prof Dyer questioned the widely held view that Foresters were insular and isolated.



Christopher Dyer

The peasantry of the day, he argued, were not “losers” but played an active part in society. Far from being held back by living in a land set aside for hunting, they were able to plan for the future, express their ideas and, as records revealed, trade outside West Gloucestershire notably to Gloucester and Bristol. “Assarting” — the acquisition of land by clearance — was carried out throughout the area and in comparison with their counterparts on the Cotswolds the Forest holdings were generally larger.

Prof Dyer gave documentary examples from both sides of the Severn in a fascinating lecture which brought forward many questions and, no doubt, will encourage members to take a closer look at life in the Dean between 1200 and 1540.