

# FOREST OF DEAN LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

*news*  
*November 2025*



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November 2025

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## Editors Notes

Included in this edition are the now traditional pull-out pages in the centre, featuring the 2026 calendar, with synopses of each event which just can't be fitted onto your membership card. You will also find order forms for New Regard 41 (at a special members rate!), which features more diverse and interesting stories about characters, places and events from the colourful history of the Forest area. There is also an opportunity to buy the companion books 'The Story of the Forest' and 'The Wildlife of the Forest', with a special offer price if you buy both together.

As usual I have tried to find an image for the front cover with an association to one of the following articles. This time the image is of the view from Lydney Park Mansion gardens, looking towards the Severn Estuary. Chris and Mary Sullivan are the driving force behind a team of volunteers who have reopened the Museum at Lydney Park during the times that the Woodland Park is open to visitors each spring. The Society is aiming to produce a 'Lydney Park' special New Regard, which can be sold to the many visitors to the museum. Mary is researching the lives of the Lydney Park estate workers and is appealing for your help. There are more details in her article towards the centre pages.

Elsewhere in this edition Cecile Hunt continues to lead us through the history of the bark industry, with a tantalising mention of 'Bark Barns'. Do you know of any such barns??

Sue Newton updates us on the History Competition, and provides the result of the History Quiz final, with St White's triumphing once again this year.

Finally, a personal note, congratulations to Steve Carter, winner of the GLHA Bryan Jerrard award. Steve started by writing articles for the newsletter, before progressing on to write for the New Regard. Also, congratulations to Ian Gower, a very well deserved winner of the FVAF 'Volunteer of the year' award. Ian finds time to volunteer in multiple roles across several different organisations, quite apart from being our Membership Secretary.

*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.*

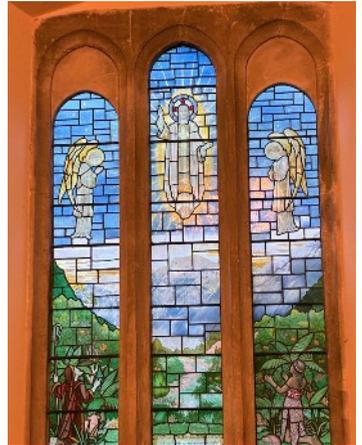
# Notes from the Chair

I expect that many of you have enjoyed some of the events organized by Heritage Open Days (HODS) in the Forest this September, giving us access to, or 'behind the scenes' talks about places that we can't normally enter. Janet Marrott and her team always work tremendously hard to put on an impressive array of all sorts of events in a variety of locations across the Forest. This is more remarkable this year due to Janet often directing operations from her sick bed. I think that Janet would welcome any volunteer assistance in future, should anyone wish to step forward and help.

Our FODLHS Committee members provided a strong offering within the packed timetable. Owen McLaughlin presented his talk on Camp 61 at the Main Place, to an audience that included some descendants from Italian POWs. They naturally had a particular interest in what their forefathers had been doing in the Forest, at the camp and in the construction of the remarkable Marconi monument.

The theme for HODS events is set at a national level and this year it was about architecture and structures. Simon Moore provided a fascinating history of St Mary's Church in Lydney, highlighting particular features of interest within the Church, with particular reference to the Bathurst Chapel. This contained an excellent display (created by Mary Sullivan) about the family history and the link with Charles Bathurst, 1st Viscount Bledisloe, who served as the Governor-General of New Zealand from 1930 to 1935 (which is why the beautiful stained glass window depicts a view in New Zealand). Even more importantly, Viscount Bledisloe was the first President of FODLHS.

There was also an opportunity to climb up the bell tower, to learn a little about the complexities of bell ringing and then ascend to the roof to admire the fantastic view around Lydney. I have a strange compulsion to climb up high towers, even though I have a serious fear of heights and am terrified when I get there! The way I cling to the



*The New Zealand window*

stonework and peek at the view from a semi-crouched position provides endless entertainment to my family and any others in the vicinity (until I make a rapid descent back down to safer ground).

Chris Sullivan provided a fascinating talk about the excavations of the Roman temple site at Lydney Park estate, illustrated with lots of artefacts that are on display in the museum at Lydney Park. You can still see some of the remains in the grounds when they are open for a limited period in the Spring.

Both Chris and Roger Deeks delivered talks in their respective churches, so we could admire the beautiful architectural features of each one. Roger Deeks at All Saints Church in Viney Hill entertained us with tales of 'The Poet, the Bohemian Novelist and the Gypsy King' and how they were connected to the Church.

I am always impressed by our local experts and enjoy learning about our local history – and there's always more to learn.

*Sue Middleton*



*The bell ringing platform  
at St Marys Church, Lydney*



## Membership

The membership year 2025/26 is now well underway and the membership has continued to grow. Thank you to all those who have already renewed their subscriptions to the Society. Membership cards for those who have already renewed accompany this newsletter, and for others, a renewal form is enclosed.

Please either pay through our online shop facility at <https://forestofdeanhistory.org.uk/join-the-fod-local-history-society>, or if you prefer please pay by BACS, and then email or post me a membership renewal form as well, so I can ensure that all your contact details are correct and up to date.

To pay using the online shop, you do not need to have a PayPal account: the system just uses PayPal to process your debit/credit card details securely. It would be helpful to me if you could pay for membership renewal as a separate transaction from any publications you order, so I can record them separately. If you believe you have renewed your membership but have not received a membership card, please email me at [membership@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk](mailto:membership@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk) or call 01594 543042 so I can amend my records and send your card.

As well as renewals, I am pleased to welcome the following new members to our Society: Victoria and Paul West, Katherine and Bob Garside, Paula and David Farmer, and Hazel Bevan. We hope you enjoy your membership and look forward to seeing you at forthcoming meetings and events.

*Ian Gower* ([membership@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk](mailto:membership@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk))

## FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> December 3pm

Kirstie Bingham brings us 'A Merry Tudor Christmas'  
West Dean Centre, Bream GL15 6JW

## Award Winners At The AGM



*Pictured above, Chair Sue Middleton presenting respectively the Cyril Hart Award to Chris Sullivan, and the Scott Garrett Award to Mary Sullivan on behalf of Dr Cherry Lewis. They each received a certificate and £50.*

# AGM Snapshot

Members were welcomed by Chair Sue Middleton to the 2025 Annual General Meeting, on Saturday 18th October at West Dean Centre, Bream. A synopsis of Sue's report follows, starting with her review of the meetings:

*'The October talk featured Dr Cherry Lewis telling us about David Mushet's letters to his wife. In November Chantelle Lyons spoke about her book 'Groundbreakers', relating to the boar in the Forest and elsewhere. Things took a nautical turn over the winter with Richard Clammer talking about John Cabot and 'The Matthew' in 1497, followed by Chris Witts providing a more recent account of his working 'Life on the River Severn'. In February Sylvia Crocker talked about 'Encroachments in the New Forest in the 18th century'. Then we benefited from the expertise of two committee members: Dr Nigel Costley explaining 'The Search for Tidal Power from the Severn' in March and Owen McLaughlin describing the Wynols Hill POW Camp 61 and the Marconi Monument. In May Alan Pilbeam described 'The Royal Progress through Gloucestershire of 1535'. When our indoor talks resumed in September, Dr Jason Griffiths and his team told us about the 'New Discoveries from the Forest of Dean Writers Collection'.*

*Thanks to Cecile Hunt for providing such an interesting array of speakers. The number of people attending the indoor talks has ranged from 50 up to 88, with an average of 68 this year, which represents a good increase on last year's average of 59.*

*In June some of us visited Cyfarthfa Castle in Merthyr Tydfil, the family home of the Crawshays. In July Cecile Hunt repeated the popular Newnham Walk covering various points of interest. In September, four of our committee members, namely Owen McLaughlin, Simon Moore, Chris & Mary Sullivan hosted events as part of the 'Heritage Open Days' in the Forest. The Sullivan double act was also involved, along with other volunteers, in the re-opening of Lydney Park Gardens for visitors in the Spring.*

*We ran the History Competition and History Quiz again in Forest Primary Schools this year. We found that some schools produced such a vast array of material, that we wanted to celebrate their achievements. Consequently, we organised a 'Schools Day' at the end of the summer term where we displayed lots of History Competition entries so that the children and their proud families could see them all. We will see some of the winners at our next talk in November.'*

Sue then thanked committee members for their work and said that the Society is fortunate to have a dedicated team of people on the committee.

The winner of the Cyril Hart Award for the best written and researched article appearing in our New Regard Number 39 is Chris Sullivan for his article entitled 'The development of the Wye Tour and Goodrich's world-class art gallery.' Those attending the indoor talks 'scored' the speakers to decide the winner of the Scott Garrett Award, which this year went to Dr Cherry Lewis for her talk on David Mushet's letters to his wife.

The following officers of the Society were elected or re-elected:

Chair: Sue Middleton	Vice Chair: Mary Sullivan	Secretary: Owen McLaughlin
Treasurer: Jan Bailey	Membership: Ian Gower	Conservation: Simon Moore
Meetings: Cecile Hunt	Publications: Mary Sullivan	Newsletter Editor: Keith Walker
Schools Liaison: Sue Newton	. Ian Gower	New Regard Editor: Nigel Costley
Member: John Lane	Enquiries: Averil Kear	Member: Malcolm Hackman
	Member: Chris Sullivan	

The Treasurer, Jan Bailey, presented the accounts for financial year 2024-2025. Total receipts for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> July were £11169. whilst total payments were £6600, leaving net receipts for the year at £4659. Receipts from sales of all publications were £5148, whilst expenditure in production of publications was £2302, leaving net receipts for the year of £2846. The monetary assets of the Society were declared to be: General account: £15139, Deposit account: £22223, Publications cash float: £50, giving total cash assets of £37412.

# Lydney Park Estate Workers *by Mary Sullivan*

A number of your Committee members, plus three others, ran a rota to open the Lydney Park Museum last summer, for the first time since Covid lockdown. About 1,100 people, a third of those visiting the Spring Garden from Easter to June, came up to see us. Perhaps you were one of them.

The main attraction for many visitors was the Roman room, displaying material found at the Roman site, mainly from the first excavation nearly 220 years ago. Though there's nothing flashy, it's a great assemblage, of international importance to archaeologists. And others. An academic at Cork University visited twice, with an interest in the origins of the Lydney god Nodens and his Irish equivalent. We think that the Roman temple site is a part of Lydney's history that should be celebrated and better known. And by the time you read this, the first pre-publication report from an academic study of the collection in September should be emerging. That study has identified lots of new fragments such as spoon handles, spindle whorls and a tiny dog in relief, as well as new military material.

The Museum's other room shows material brought back by the first Viscount Bledisloe, as he became, from when he was Governor-General of New Zealand between 1930 and 1935, and shows leaving gifts from Maori leaders and others. This room is less documented and studied, but a number of visitors were familiar with items from visits to New Zealand. Dutch visitors were surprised by the Lydney Park link to their Royal Family.

The rota team got a range of questions about the Bathurst family, and there was a regular theme of interest in the Estate workers. Your Society is very much about recording voices and histories of people beyond a few 'big names'. So, we are wondering whether there is enough material about past Estate workers to make an article for the New Regard, perhaps in a Lydney Park Special, and for next year's Society display boards for the planned Museum opening.

In the past, indeed the recent past, members of the same family could be working for the Estate in different capacities – cleaning, office work, gardening, forestry and, further back, in running a much larger household. Comments included 'my relative X was the butler', or 'Y was a footman', showing how different life at the Big House was, and now very little known. And not forgetting 'as a child, I had a little desk in the Museum to sell replica Roman coins, model soldiers and Lydney Dogs'.

If you, or one of your family, have any memories or photos from across the 20<sup>th</sup> century that you are willing to share, please contact me to arrange a time for a phone call or chat in person. I am really looking forward to learning more about the lives of the staff and what it was like to be on the estate in earlier days.

Mary Sullivan, Vice Chair FODLHS

[vicechair@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk](mailto:vicechair@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk)

07976 631547



*The photo (left) features two Lydney Park Estate workers who were recognised this year for more than 100 years of service between them.*

*Pictured front left is Brian Reece who was born on the Estate and became Head Forester at just 21 years of age.*

*Steven Harrison (front right) started work on the Estate as a Forester but was later promoted to be Sawmill Manager.*

*Can you help Mary find stories like this from earlier times?*

## IMPORTANT NOTICE

If circumstances change and meetings have to be cancelled or rescheduled, you will be advised by notices posted to our Facebook page and by emails. The events page of our website ([forestofdeanhistory.org.uk](http://forestofdeanhistory.org.uk)) will also be updated as necessary.

**Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> January 2026 3pm**  
**West Dean Centre, Bream, GL15 6JW**

### **'þen hentes he þe healme'**

**A demonstration of putting on medieval armour and the purpose of each piece with Dr Rob Jones**



Well known now to History Society members, Dr Robert Jones is an historian specialising in the socio-cultural history of medieval warfare and warriors. He is an experienced costumed interpreter, with his own medieval armour, giving talks and demonstrations to the general public and specialist interest groups. A historian with a passion for medieval history and his own suit of armour!

As he says himself, *"It is not enough to simply describe and display the objects of the past, they can only really be understood in the context of their time. In my presentations I combine explanation of the practicalities of the weapons and armour with the stories, beliefs, and culture of those who wore it."*

**Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> February 2026 3pm**  
**West Dean Centre, Bream, GL15 6JW**

**"Get Orff My Land" - John Putley on the history of Farming in Gloucestershire from prehistory to World War I**

John Putley will talk about how farming evolved from the earliest times, describing how a landscape that was naturally wildwood was tamed and altered to grow crops and feed livestock.

He will discuss how early man developed tools to till the land, fell trees and butcher animals. Iron Age, Roman, Saxon, Medieval and Tudor agriculture will be examined, moving into the 19<sup>th</sup> century via the Agrarian Revolution. then up to the First World War.

The talk may include possible diversions into how far back carrots were grown, when hens and rabbits were introduced, and a tribute to our local breeds of cow, sheep and pig.



# Forest of Dean Local History Society Calendar 2026

**Saturday 14th March 2026 3pm**  
**West Dean Centre, Bream, GL15 6JW**

## **Cecil Hunt and Averil Kear discuss ‘The Lydney Park and Dyrham Park connection’**



Averil & Cecile investigated in 2019 the possibility of doing a trip to Dyrham Park for Society members to share events and history relating to Dyrham Park, and its close surrounds, falling outside of the Dyrham Park guidebook. Using that research this talk delves into the Wynter's of Lydney connections with Dyrham, their associations with Sir Francis Drake and the discovery of a preventive and cure for scurvy. It will also look at an accusation by the Crown (1574) into the right to collect prisage (an ancient import tax) by local men, G Wynter and Sir Charles Somerset having possibly illegally claimed it.

The presentation will look at the history of the park itself, how it was enlarged and became a ‘deer park’ plus other historical bits & pieces. Part of the Dyrham parish in which Dyrham Park sits saw the Battle of Dyrham which took place in AD577 well before Dyrham Park existed. The Battle of Deorham has been interpreted as a significant, defining event in the history of the Britain.

**Saturday 18th April 2026 3pm**  
**West Dean Centre, Bream, GL15 6JW**

## **Cecil Hunt describes ‘St Briavels Village - some forgotten bits of history’**

This presentation looks at some of St Briavels forgotten bits of history. Not so much a history of its church and castle although the talk will touch on these monuments but not in great depth as there is quite a bit of readily available written history already on these buildings and their more widely known history.



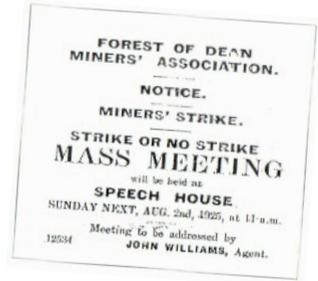
The presentation will be concentrating on more of the forgotten, not widely written about, aspects of St Briavels including its Almshouses and their benefactor; the parish workhouse and its association with Chepstow, the network of lanes that used to centre on the Castle, a World War One convalescent home plus the Castle and village being the primary centre for English quarrel manufacturing in the 13<sup>th</sup> & 14<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Also looked at will be the effect of the Black Death on the constables of the Forest who lived in St Briavels Castle at the time of the pestilence.

**Saturday 16th May 2026 3pm  
West Dean Centre, Bream, GL15 6JW**

**Dr Nigel Costley presents  
'The 1926 General Strike and the miners' lock-out in the Forest of Dean'**

100 years ago on 3 May 1926, miners, including those of the Forest of Dean, were 'locked-out' by their employers when they refused to accept pay cuts and longer hours. The following day much of the country stopped work in the greatest act of solidarity seen in this country. Britain was brought to a standstill. The nine days of the 'General Strike' are still the cause of much debate. Unions called off the action, leaving the miners to fight on alone for the next eight months. Mining was by far the largest employer in the Forest. The local MP, Alf Purcell, was a left-wing member of the TUC General Council and at the centre of the crisis. He met with miners in The Palace in Cinderford to tell them why the strike had been called off. When Westbury Guardians stopped paying poor relief to families, women occupied the workhouse in protest. The miners were eventually starved back into work on the bosses terms.



## **June, July & August Outdoor Meetings**

The date, time & meeting places will be announced in the newsletter and via email nearer the time

**Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> September 2026 3pm  
West Dean Centre, Bream, GL15 6JW**

**Jan Bailey discusses  
'An Interpretation of the DHC's Collection of Skulls & Bones  
in an Archaeological Context'**



Our Treasurer Jan Bailey will talk about human remains recovered from archaeological contexts that are part of the collections held at Dean Heritage Centre. She will tell the stories as far as we know of the individuals in the collection. Part of the presentation will explore how these people can

be represented in the local context, and the research potential of the collection.

The talk will be followed by a discussion about how people feel about human remains in museum collections.

# Forest of Dean Local History Society Calendar 2026

**Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> October 2025 2'30pm**  
**West Dean Centre, Bream, GL15 6JW**

**Annual General Meeting followed by**  
**Forest of Dean Writers Collection: More Discoveries with Dr Jason Griffiths**

After a very successful talk in 2025, Dr Jason Griffiths will return to introduce 'More Discoveries from the Forest of Dean Writers Collection.' The research, cataloguing and curation of this new collection is enriching our understanding and appreciation of the Forest of Dean's incredible literary heritage and its wider history. The vast new archive of papers includes early drafts; notebooks; unpublished poems, novels, anthologies and play scripts; photographs; paintings and more that belonged to some of the Forest of Dean's poets and authors. Jason will once again delve into some of the fascinating findings coming to light from the new collection and show how it is being used to inspire future generations of Forest writers, creatives and historians.



**Saturday 21st November 2026 3pm**  
**West Dean Centre, Bream, GL15 6JW**

**Simon Moore presents 'A New Look at our Forest Churches'**



Our Conservation Officer Simon Moore will explore a 'New Look at our Forest Churches' in this talk. Simon was brought up in Drybrook, and was educated at the Royal Forest of Dean Grammar School at Five Acres. He then started working at 18 as a technician to an Architect in Monmouth, followed by work in Gloucester for Bruton Knowles, as assistant to their staff Architect and then as Surveyor. He became a Chartered Building Surveyor (RICS), and is a member of the Society for Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB). He is also a long-standing church warden of St Mary's, Lydney. His extensive knowledge and understanding of church architecture and history makes him the ideal candidate to deliver this fascinating talk.

**Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> December 2026 3pm**  
**West Dean Centre, Bream, GL15 6JW**

**David Elder presents an 'A - Z of the Forest of Dean'**

With its own traditions and strong sense of identity and independence, the Forest of Dean appears as a separate, almost secret, part of Gloucestershire. Some of its ancient history has only recently come to light, after lying hidden beneath the forest canopy for millennia. Based on his book, local author David Elder will take his audience on an A-Z tour around the region's history, uncovering the stories of its buildings, sons and daughters, natural features and fascinating old routes and thoroughfares. Alongside the famous historical connections, are unusual characters, tucked away places and unique events that are less well-known. From its highest point, once known as Yarleton Hill, to the shores of its two vast rivers, we discover hidden places, many mentioned in the Domesday Book, characterful rocks and ancient trees.



## Bark of the Oak Part 2 by Cecile Hunt

Oak bark was the best for preserving hides and enhancing their durability and lastingness. Bark was big business in the Forest of Dean, a by-product of timber production for fuel, house building, ship building, et al. In the early 1800s advertisements abounded in newspapers throughout the UK. The Gloucester Journal, one of the newspapers of the day to have regular advertisements for either the Crown selling unwanted ships timber and/or the subsequent bark or private sellers of timber and bark grown in the Forest of Dean.

For example: in March 1800 the Lords Commissioner of his Majesty's Treasury advertised that they had: *'directed the following Oak Timber Trees to be felled in the Forest of Dean, this Season, for Use of his Majesty's Navy, viz.*

*In Park-End Walk, anciently called York Lodge Walk; 281 Trees, marked progressively with white paint, from No 1 to 181 on Lodge Hill.*

*Worcester Walk; 232 Trees, marked progressively with white Paint, from No 282 to 513 on Baron Hill  
Speech House Walk; 61 and 76 Trees... in said walk*

*It is also expected that the Lords of the Treasury will give Orders for felling the undermentioned old, decayed, and unimproving oak trees viz.*

*Herbert Lodge Walk; 773. Tees marked progressively...*

*Latimer Lodge Walk; 70 Trees, marked in like manner...*

*Speech House Walk; 257 Trees, marked in like manner*

*Worcester Lodge Walk; 100 Trees ...*

*York Lodge Walk; 100 Trees...*

*Danby Lodge Walk; 170 Trees*

*Such Persons as shall be desirous of purchasing the **Bark** of the said Trees, as they now stand, are requested to send in their proposals (sealed up) on or before the 5th of April next directed to John Robinson, esq, Surveyor General of his Majesty's Wood... Holborn, London...*



*The Feather's Hotel, Lydney  
in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century*

The above is a good representation of many adverts placed by the Lords Commissioners of his Majesty's Treasury. Some adverts were placed by the order of Commissioner of his Majesty's Woods, for just bark to be sold by Auction. These were sold at the site where trees had been felled and stripped; sold as 'Rails of Bark'. The Bear Inn in Newnham was regularly used for auctioning of timber and bark. In May 1811 eight 'Lots of BARK from felled trees for the Navy' were put up for sale; 4 Lots in Worcester Walk, 3 Lots in Herbert Walk and one Lot at Parkend Lodge. *'N.B. Each Rail of Bark will be marked in Red Paint with the number of the Lot to which it belongs'.*

The Speech House and The Feathers Inn (Lydney) were other regular places where timber and bark auctions were held. The Gloucester Journal of April 5th 1845 advertised a very large auction at the Speech House by Commissioners of Woods at lots at various sites around the Forest; 6 lots of Oak Timber Trees, 19 lots of Bark from thinning's, 13 lots of mixed thinning's plus there were 9 lots from various woods situated on the Highmeadow Estate of: oak bark and thinning's, Ash timber, Cherry trees and cords of underwood.

Bark once stripped from a tree was dried at the site of felling by laying the strips of bark out on 'legs'. Branches of the felled trees were utilised to make airy benches, or racks, to lay the newly stripped bark out on to dry.

Dried Bark was stored in 'Bark Barns' until either sold on or used. Scattered around the Forest are several ex 'Bark Barns'. These barns would normally have a tannery nearby. Do you know of a building or street/lane near you with 'Bark' in its name? Where were the tanneries – more next time.

# Celebration of Schools' History Competition 2025

The FoDLHS schools team have arranged a celebration of the winners of the Schools' History Competition 2025 work at our meeting on Saturday 15th November 2025. The children, their families and teachers have been invited as VIPs to share their work with members. We invite you to arrive slightly earlier to support the children and encourage them to continue with their interest in local history. You may recall how receptive the children were to your appreciation of their success at the 2024 celebration.

Moving forward to this current academic year, the school team is starting early and are seeking support from members. There is no commitment required, initially we would just like to talk to any members who have links with schools in any capacity, (work, volunteers, teachers, family of children attending local schools etc). Please email/text/ring Sue N or seek her out at meetings to discuss.

We are provisionally planning to build on the success of our first "school history open afternoon" held on 29th June 2025 at the Main Place in Coleford, where we displayed all the children's work in addition to that of the winners. However, we will need support as its popularity increases. We need members who can commit to a few hours over a weekend to collect work from schools on Friday afternoon, bring to the open afternoon on Sunday for display, then collect at the end of the day and return to the school on the following Monday. The actual date of the event in June 2026 will be confirmed later. Please contact Sue N if you can help. Thank you!

Finally, our Schools Quiz was held again this year. Eight schools took part in the Quiz and the finals were held in June. The finalists were Ellwood, Parkend and St Whites Schools. After a close and exciting contest, St. Whites retained the title. The winner's shield has been engraved and presented to the St. Whites team. (see photo right).

**Sue Newton** Schools Liaison Officer

email: [schools.liaison@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk](mailto:schools.liaison@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk) mob: 07908712744



## Dean Heritage Centre News with Nicola Wynn

Work has been solidly progressing on our NLHF project this year with a business appraisal, audience development work, topographical survey, hydrogeological survey, biodiversity survey and collections review. Reports will be out by the end of the year which will feed into a further NLHF application next year to improve the site.

Our brilliant team of volunteers, Jason Griffiths and Robyn Timmins have been hard at work on the Forest of Dean Writers Collection with hundreds more documents cleaned, archivally housed and catalogued as well as a talk given in September to FODLHS and a display and performance in Lydney library in September.

Good news on the funding front we have been successful in our application for the Museums Renewal Fund and have been awarded £58k by Arts Council England. This will support our financial resilience and enable us to work with an interpretation consultant on installing an app for the site with engaging interpretation.

### EVENTS:

1<sup>st</sup>-30<sup>th</sup> November Bell ringing exhibition in Gallery 4

2<sup>nd</sup> November Guided walk

8<sup>th</sup> November Forest Folklore

6<sup>th</sup> December Christmas bazaar

Weekends in December visit Father Christmas

[www.deanheritagecentre.org](http://www.deanheritagecentre.org)

# Richard Read Transport Ltd *by Averil Kear*



**Richard Read**

The Richard Read story began in 1946, when Richard Read, made two decisions that were to affect him for the rest of his life. The first one was to marry Amelia, and the second was to start his own business.

Richard had been influenced by the success of his father who had been hauling since 1913, and on his return from wartime service with the Royal Navy, he gave up his driving job with his brother's firm to launch his own transport business. Richard went in for sinking wells - not for oil but water. There was no sophisticated drilling rig to use; all that he had was a spade and the bend in his back. His first lorry cost him £350.00 and in the first month of operation, he remembers handling 1,350 tons of stone to help build the Gloucester Ring Road. Extra contracts soon followed and additional lorries were bought and shortly afterwards Richard bought his first new vehicle, a Bedford four-wheeler, registration number KFH 8.

It wasn't until 1959 that the relationship between ERF (Edwin Richard Foden) and Richard Read came into being. At that time Richard purchased his first ERF, registration TDG 689 and it was the first Articulated Tractor Unit in the fleet. During the 1960's, Richard and Amelia ran a fleet of 87 vehicles, an all time high for the company. Meanwhile the ERF Distributorship, Richard Read (Commercials) Ltd was starting to sell new ERF vehicles throughout the United Kingdom.

Those who knew Richard will tell you he was never afraid of making an investment in a new venture. At the end of the 1970's he built his first warehouse on his 6 acre site at Longhope. This decision effectively changed the course of direction for his companies in future years. During the 1980's a further warehouse was built, and additional space was rented.

In 1995 Richard was able to buy land at Cinderford. A 4.5 acre site was purchased and a 71,000 sq ft warehouse erected. The new warehouse had fully mobile racking installed to one third of the floor space, capable of holding a total of nearly 20,000 pallets at any time.

At the beginning of 1997, a second warehouse of 21,000 sq ft was added to the Cinderford site. The site was controlled from a new administration centre. It was computer linked to all major customers, and a 24-hour video security system and computerised weighbridge ensured that the customers' products were kept securely.

Richard Read died in 2014 aged 89, and the Richard Read business continued in the hands of son Richard and his wife Kay, alongside daughter Brenda. Richard had five children altogether, Sheila, Brenda, Richard, Alison and the late Ian, as well as 11 grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

At the end of March 2019, the family firm of Richard Read (Transport) Ltd, which had traded for 73 years, announced that the wheels on its fleet of haulage lorries would finally stop turning.

The difficult decision to close was made because the Company could no longer see a way to run profitably. At the time it was a constant battle to remain competitive whilst attracting and keeping a skilled workforce and complying with all legislative requirements of the haulage industry.



**The auction on 6<sup>th</sup> April 2019 of plant and materials at Longhope after Richard Read Ltd closed down**

## Meetings in Review *with Paul Mason & Keith Walker*



**Joe Meek**

It was a very hot Sunday afternoon on Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> August 2025 when 12 members attended the Joe Meek Tour of Newent walk which really was a cradle to grave experience.

Walk organiser Pete Rochford was a most enthusiastic host with an encyclopaedic knowledge of everything Joe Meek and has recently published a biography of Meek entitled Joe Meek – Behind Closed Doors.

Joe Meek (1929-1967) was a record producer and songwriter considered one of the most influential sound engineers of all time. He is best known for producing the Tornados hit song Telstar and the haunting Johnny Remember Me by John Leyton. We subsequently discovered he was also responsible for countless other hits and for helping to develop the careers of many other famous pop groups and singers.

The walk began at Joe's birthplace in Market Place just behind the Market Hall and appropriately for a record producer the address was No 1. We moved on to St Mary's Church where Joe's funeral took place and Pete had some very good photographs taken on the day which helped set the scene for the attendees. The town's war memorial in the churchyard contains the names of two of Joe's uncles.

Next up was Kathleen House on Gloucester Street where a charity is based that supports adults with learning disabilities. Joe always supported this charity in his home town and made regular contributions, both financially and in person, throughout his life.

We retraced our way back down Church Street where we passed the Cobblers micro pub, formerly the premises where the Meek family ran a fish and chip shop.

Turning up the High Street Pete pointed out the Kam Wah Chinese Takeaway, once a television and wireless repair shop, where Joe began his working life and developed some of the skills that he used in later life in the music industry.

On the junction with Watery Lane was the family home where Joe spent most of his life in Newent. This premises also housed the family dairy business which looks almost unchanged to this day and Pete was able to point out Joe's bedroom window from where he used to record all sorts of sounds from passing traffic to the birds singing in the adjacent trees.

It was a long walk to see Picklenash School where Joe spent his entire school life and then we looped back to Newent Lake where Joe always went when he came back to Newent as it often gave him the inspiration for new songs and ideas. By this time some attendees decided to call it a day with the hot sun making walking a bit of a challenge.

It was an even longer walk to the cemetery in Watery Lane, scene of Joe's final resting place, so most people took cars. Joe's parents are also buried in this cemetery along with some of his siblings.

To round off Pete read an extract from his book which described the scene at the graveside from one of the actual attendees on the day. He ended with a question-and-answer session that inevitably brought up the controversy surrounding Joe's death. By all accounts a television documentary is in preparation which may well offer some alternative views.

The Joe Meek Story may not be over quite yet.

*P.M.*



*Plaque on 1 Market Place  
Newent, birthplace of Joe Meek*

***Pete Rochford will be giving a talk entitled 'The Life & Times of Joe Meek' on  
Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> November, 3pm at West Dean Centre, Bream***

In 2023 a collaborative partnership was formed between the University of Gloucestershire and Dean Heritage Centre to bring together a unique collection of material spanning more than 200 years, some written in local dialect, reflecting the landscape, people and places of the Forest of Dean. The 'Forest of Dean Writers Collection' project was awarded over £130,000 to carry out the work over a two-year period. Volunteers have been researching and cataloguing innumerable items donated by descendants from the UK and USA, to become part of Dean Heritage Centre's permanent collection.

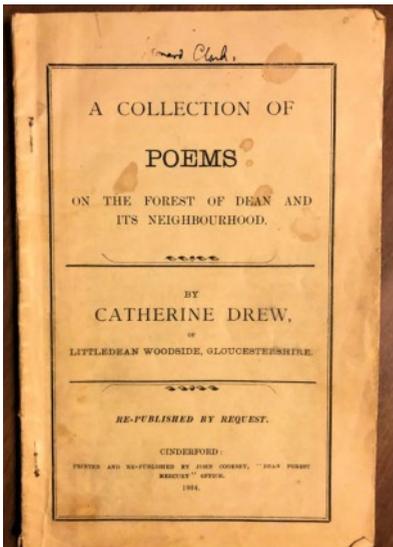


On Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> September Jason Griffiths (pictured above), together with Alison Johnson and Robyn Timmins, gave a talk entitled 'Discoveries', to give an update on progress, and share some of the material uncovered by the project.

Jason started by outlining his expectations that 350 objects might be collected, but staggeringly some 3500 objects have been donated / collected so far. To deal with the avalanche of material over 1000 hours of volunteering have been expended to date.

The focus then moved to three gifted authors whose work has had a new light shone on it by the project.

Leonard Clark OBE was born in Guernsey in 1905. He had a troubled childhood and was fostered by a widow in Cinderford. He was a prolific poet, literary editor, educationalist, and author of more than 50 books. Most well known amongst the book titles are 'A Fool in the Forest', (1965), 'Green Wood: A Gloucestershire Childhood', (1962), 'Grateful Caliban', (1967), and 'An Inspector Remembers', (1976). He was also a beekeeper and played rugby and cricket. He married and moved to Plymouth where he was employed as an Inspector of Schools. He died in 1981.



*A 1904 reprint of Catherine Drew's anthology of poems, interestingly with Leonard Clark's handwritten name at the top of the front cover*

Born in 1784 and christened at Abenhall Church, Catherine Drew became a popular poet and was known as 'The Forest Poetess'. Despite only nine days of formal schooling, she published an anthology of her poems in 1841. Excitingly a previously unknown poem was discovered in a tin box at the Heritage Centre. Her work left a legacy that described the transformative contemporary times she was living through. She died in 1867.

Harry Beddington, born in 1901 in Ruspidge, is largely remembered today through his humorous 'Jolter' character. He wrote and spoke in dialect, and was an author, dramatist, writer of plays, performer and producer. His works include Waxworks (1945), Double Dutch (1945) and Fruit Salad (1947). Previously unknown plays, including 'Double Dutch' and 'Talking Turkey' have come to light during the project. Jason ended the presentation by displaying several sketches and paintings produced during Harry's lifetime.

**K.W.**

*The Heritage Centre have made available online lists of documents they have collected, catalogued by author. You can see the lists here:*  
<https://www.deanheritagecentre.org/forest-of-dean-writers-collection>

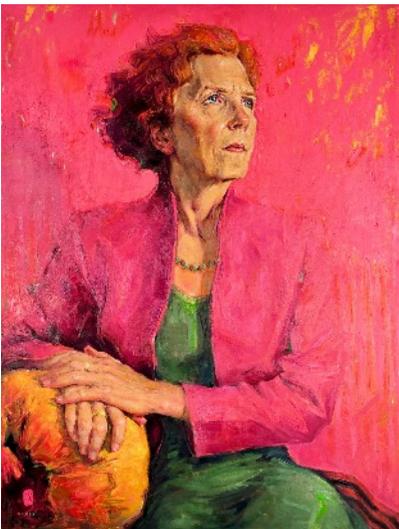
## Two Prize Winners & Our President



The photo above shows Nigel Costley (New Regard Editor) receiving the 2025 Brian Jerrard Award on behalf of Steven Carter from Dr John Chandler at the recent Gloucestershire Local History Association AGM. Steven's winning article was 'Coleford's Jovial Foresters', as featured in New Regard 39 (2024).



Our Membership Secretary Ian Gower recently won the coveted Forest Volunteers Award – Volunteer of the Year (People's Champion) – following a public vote that attracted over 3,500 participants. Ian's tireless work spans multiple organisations including CANDI, Mitcheldean Youth Club, and Scarr Bandstand. He inspires young people through STEM education, drawing on his engineering background with Rolls Royce.



Our President, Jan Royall, served as Principal of Somerville College Oxford for the past eight years. She has now come to the end of her tenure. Previously Jan has been Leader of the House of Lords (from 2008), as well as Chief Whip and Privy Counsellor. Her new challenges include becoming Chair of the Jo Cox Foundation, and Chair of the Board of AVLA (Association of Leading Visitor Attractions), whilst also continuing to attend the House of Lords. She also intends to involve herself more with our Society.

In recognition of her role at Somerville a striking portrait (left) has been painted by the renowned artist, Tanya Rivilis.

Vice President, Averil Kear, has been carrying out research on the history of Jan's cottage in Blaisdon, for which Jan extends her grateful thanks.