

FOREST OF DEAN LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

news

August 2024

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August 2024

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Editors Notes

As you will see, in this edition, (much the same as last August's newsletter), I was supplied with a goodly number of colour photographs with the accompanying text. Our Treasurer generously agreed that we could run a full colour 20 page edition, so please enjoy the colour fest that follows!

There are a few correspondents who regularly supply copy for the newsletter, but I must mention Cecile Hunt here, who has supplied interesting and informative articles for fifty, yes fifty, consecutive editions of the newsletter. Thank you Cecile, long may your contributions continue!

On the back page you will find a report of the Gloucestershire Local History Afternoon, which was organised this year by your Society, under the very able direction of Mary Sullivan. Congratulations to Mary and her team for providing an enjoyable afternoon in Coleford for historians from all over Gloucestershire.

A special Coleford focused edition of the New Regard was produced in record time especially for the GLHA Afternoon by NR Editor Nigel Costley. You will find an order form for the Coleford Special New Regard in the centre (pull out) pages.

Nigel has also provided an interesting article for this newsletter, concerning his time as Local Agent to the Labour Party during the 1997 General Election, when big hitter John Prescott dropped into Coleford on his 'battle bus'.

It is nearly membership renewal time once again, and although there is a renewal form in the centre pull out pages, Ian Gower (our Membership Secretary) has asked that if you can, to please renew your membership via the Society's website.

Last and certainly not least, the front cover shows a walking group in Market Square, Coleford, during the GLHA Afternoon. The tour was led by retiring Chair John Lane. John also led a 'valedictory' walk in Gloucester on 20th July when he once again demonstrated his deep knowledge of Gloucester's History. Thanks are due to John for his time as Chair. He has indicated he will stay on the Committee, so we should be able to perhaps enjoy more walks in his company in the future.

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.

Views from the Chair by John Lane

Unbelievably (to me at any rate), this will be my last report as your Chairman. I really do not know where the last three years have gone!

I have thoroughly enjoyed my tenure as Chairman of our wonderful Society. I have been supported (and guided!) by the Committee members and I would like to express my sincere thanks to them all for their assistance and friendship over the last three years.

On the subject of the Committee, I am afraid my plea for volunteers to act as our Treasurer, fell on deaf ears! However, there is still time to step forward and help your Society!



At the end of July, the Society hosted the Gloucestershire Local History Association Day (GLHA) at Coleford (more of which elsewhere in this Newsletter). A great many people put in a huge amount of work to ensure the day was a huge success and I would like to put on record my thanks to them all - we can all be

justifiably proud of ourselves for representing the Society in such a good light.



Simon Moore (complete with top hat) leading a walk during the GLHA Afternoon outside Bank House

Timed to coincide with the GLHA Day was the release of the latest New Regard. What a publication it is too! The quality and quantity of articles relating to Coleford are tremendous! I encourage you all to buy one, if you haven't done so already, and to ensure all your friends and relatives do likewise, especially if they have any connections with the town.

Nigel Costley has done a sterling job in enhancing the reputation and high standing of the New Regard and the Society owes him a huge debt of gratitude.

Once again this year, your Society promoted and sponsored the Schools History Competition. In addition, a Schools Quiz was launched. (Further details appear later in this newsletter). Both events were hugely successful and inspire a confidence that the Forest's unique history is being perpetuated among our younger inhabitants. We can only hope they are future members of the History Society and can themselves, ensure the rich and varied narrative of the Forest continues long into the future.

Whether they will or not remains to be seen but it won't be for the lack of hard work and effort invested in organising both events and huge thanks must go to Sue Middleton and Sue Newton for their persistence and tenacity in ensuring that both the Society and local history are promoted in local schools.

Cecile Hunt is hard at work preparing a packed programme of meetings for the forthcoming Autumn and Winter. Numbers attending the indoor meetings have been increasing gradually since those dark Covid days, and hopefully, that trend will continue when we start again in October (our Annual General Meeting) with a talk from Cherry Lewis about the 'Mushet Letters'.

I would like to thank all the members of the Committee for their support during my chairmanship and look forward to meeting existing and new members in the new 'Season'.

John Lane



MEMBERSHIP

Summer is now well underway, and members have turned their attention to our programme of summer walks and visits. As I write this, the guided walk around Gloucester Docks is imminent, as is the guided tour around Newnham. Both are full to capacity so please remember to book as early as you can for future events.

Please keep an eye out for my emails to keep you informed of any additional events and activities from the Society and other organisations of interest. To that end, please let me know if you change your postal or email address, or if you would like reminders to be sent to an additional email address.

Although our indoor meetings have finished for the year, new members have again increased since the last newsletter, and I would like to extend a warm welcome to Fiona Bishop, Tony Ware, John Richardson, Geoff Bridgman, Martin Read, Maggie Clutterbuck and Dave Teague.

Finally, the new membership year will start on October 1st, so please take this opportunity to renew your membership in good time. Thank you to those who have already done so. A membership renewal form can be found within the newsletter, but if you are able, please use the online order form and payment system on our website: forestofdeanhistory.org.uk. From the homepage click on the tab "Join the FOD local history society" and follow the online ordering process.

I hope you enjoy the rest of your summer.

Ian Gower

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The latest New Regard (Coleford Special) is available now from selected local stores or direct from our website:

www.forestofdeanhistory.org.uk

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

Saturday 31st August 3pm

Typhoon aircraft: built by the Gloucester Aircraft Company, Brockworth

**Presented by
James Rendell**

**West Dean Centre, Bream
GL15 6JW**

**Saturday 12th October
2'30pm**

**Annual General Meeting
Followed by: Mushet Letters**

**Presented by
Cherry Lewis**

**West Dean Centre, Bream
GL15 6JW**

**Saturday 16th November
3pm**

**Wild Boar and their Impact
on the Forest of Dean**

**Presented by
Chantal Lyons**

**West Dean Centre, Bream
GL15 6JW**

DHC News from Nicola Wynn



Forest of Dean Writers Collection: celebrating our creative heritage

The FODWC is a collaborative project involving University of Gloucestershire, the Dean Heritage Centre, and local volunteers and schools to establish a unique literary collection, awarded £133,8867 by The National Lottery Heritage Fund.

The project started in November 2023 and is a 2 year project. Literary papers of past Forest of Dean writers will be conserved and made available to researchers, schools and the public. The new project will bring together a unique collection of material spanning more than 200 years, some written in local dialect, that reflects the landscape, people and places of the Forest of Dean. Among the unique material making up the new collection are previously unknown poems by 'Forest Poetess' Catherine Drew (1784-1867); work by poet, biographer and literary editor Leonard Clark OBE (1905-1981); books once belonging to war-poet FW Harvey (1888-1957; a never-before seen novel by Valerie Grosvenor Myer (1935-2007) better known as an academic and biographer; a memoir by former collier and farmer Fred Boughton (1897-1985) written in Forest dialect with parallel 'Queen's English' translation.

Work has been progressing well, new volunteers have been recruited and have already catalogued over a hundred items. In May an exhibition was held in Cinderford Library. **Look out for the next exhibition at Coleford Library from 7th-14th September** to see some of the new material on display. Project Manager Jason Griffiths has been carrying out great work with local schools Five Acres High School and St. John's CoFE Academy exploring local authors and inspiring the next generation.



DHC Collections Officer Nicola Wynn & Dr Jason Griffiths of the University of Gloucester pictured at the launch event of the Forest of Dean Writers Collection

Events at DHC

Summer holidays – plenty of activities for children over the summer holidays

Weds 11th September – Heritage Open Day. Free entry and a short talk at 12.00. Find out about the fascinating story of the Miles brothers travels, adventures and working in the mine industry in Australia, America and Canada.

Sun 22nd September – Autumn Equinox Fayre. Free entry with a variety of stalls from local produce, artists and hand made gifts and clothes.

Weds 9th October – Backstage in the Gage at 12.00. Come along to find out more about the new FODWC project and see items from the collection.

Sun 26th – 31st October – spooky family fun activities over Half term and Halloween.

For more details about events at DHC visit our website: <https://www.deanheritagecentre.org/>



William Dalrymple, David Olusoga, Max Hastings, Kate Mosse, Dan Jones, Alison Weir, Matthew Lewis and Jonathan Dimbleby are just some of the world-class speakers who will be sharing their love of history at Blackfriars Priory in Gloucester this Autumn. This September, you can join over 100 of Britain's top historians and authors for over 200 events spanning the ancient city over two weeks, including the unique tradition of Gloucester Day and Heritage Open Days, throwing stunning historic buildings open to all. Talks take place for 9 days at the iconic Blackfriars Priory from Saturday 14 to Sunday 22 September 2024.

For full details go to www.gloucesterhistoryfestival.co.uk/autumn-2024/

The Day John Prescott Came To Coleford by Nigel Costley

The recent general election and the political drama leading up to it, led our own Nigel Costley (New Regard Editor) to recall events in 1997, when as the local Labour Party Agent he was closely involved in Diana Organ's election campaign. In his short article below we get the inside track on how a visit by a national Labour 'big hitter' was organised at short notice.

The 'big hitter' in question was none other than John Prescott, who, after the election, was appointed Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State at the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. The 1997 election was won convincingly by the Labour Party. John Prescott will probably also be remembered as 'Two-Jags', or 'Two-Jabs' Prescott after subsequent unfortunate incidents in his career!



The Labour Party is riding high in the opinion polls against the Conservative government that has been in power a long time. The Labour leadership is nervous and refuses to take victory for granted. Labour has a controversial deputy from a working-class background. This could be the narrative from the days preceding the 2024 General Election, but this was also true in the Spring of 1997.

John Major, the Prime Minister, had to call the general election by 1 May at the latest. The Forest of Dean, with redrawn boundaries, was one of the 100 key target seats for Labour.

Tony Blair came to Gloucester on the first day of the campaign. Labour had lost the previous election in 1992 against polling predictions and there was to be no complacency this time. Tony Blair would not accept that Labour was going to win even on the plane down to London on election night. To reassure the nation, Labour offered modest promises, backed up with spending plans summarized by its five key pledges:

Cut class sizes to 30 or under for 5, 6 and 7-year-olds by using money from the assisted places scheme. Fast-track punishment for persistent young offenders by halving the time from arrest to sentencing. Cut NHS waiting lists by treating an extra 100,000 patients as a first step by releasing £100,000,000 saved from NHS red tape. Get 250,000 under-25s off benefits and into work by using money from a windfall levy on the privatised utilities. No rise in income tax rates, cut VAT on heating to 5% and inflation and interest rates as low as possible.



John Prescott and then Labour Party candidate Diana Organ pictured in Coleford on the battle bus

In the Forest of Dean, the Conservative MP, Paul Marland, knew he had a fight on his hands. Labour had selected Diana Organ who had done better than expected in 1992. Local Labour activists had been working hard in the run-up with regular newsletters, canvassing, street stalls and other publicity stunts. But the boundary changes made voting predictions hard to make.

When the election was finally called, John Prescott, Labour's controversial deputy leader, promised to visit every one of the 100 key seats. His 'battle bus' set off from the marginal seat of Camborne and Redruth in Cornwall and on day two of the five-week campaign arrived in Coleford in the Forest of Dean.

One tactic the Party was keen to deploy was to 'blitz' streets with campaigners. A large group would visit every

house in a street, not to canvass and collect voting intentions but to invite anyone to meet the candidate who would be on hand. The hope was to make a noise, a sense of occasion and generate a momentum towards polling day. D-Ream's *'Things can only get better'* would be blasted out of a mobile PA system. This approach worked well, especially in an urban setting, but it was not so good on a quiet Wednesday afternoon in Coleford!

The night before his arrival local Party officials were told to arrange the visit to fit with one of the five pledges: the promise to reduce primary school class sizes to less than 30. That meant finding a local school, with classes larger than 30, that would be happy to host such a visit at extremely short notice.

Frantic calls were made and the head of Coalway School just outside Coleford agreed, although it had a school drama planned and calls would be needed to clear it with the governors.

The big coach arrived and parked outside Coleford's town centre Coop store. Its livery still not finished, with the slogan declaring: "Don't forget to vote". The Labour logo had not been added! Accompanying Prescott was a pack of bright young things, eager to be part of a change of power but fairly clueless about managing such a visit and its media scrum. National and local journalists, fresh from the sound of the election starting gun, were keen to follow Labour's outspoken deputy.

Prescott was not to be delayed by any discussion of the visit or warnings that all might not fall into place as the London campaign machine had envisaged. He flew out of the bus and took off, not really knowing where he was going. The small crowd and media pack followed him as he stormed through the empty streets. At last, he saw an elderly woman leaving one of the shops. "Hello, I'm John Prescott for Labour", he announced. "F*** off!" She replied!

In no time, Prescott and the trailing entourage had done a circuit of the sleepy town and returned to the battle bus where we gathered the media for a hasty press call. He gave a short address and took some questions about the key issues for the campaign. He stuck to the pledges and wasn't going to be caught out by any trick question.

The visit to the school was the next item on the agenda. The large bus might not be the best way to get to Coalway School and it was agreed that he should go by car. But all those who arrived to support his visit had foreign-owned cars. Prescott, ever nervous about negative images, did not want to be seen getting out of one. So, Prescott and Diana jumped into my modest Rover for the short drive. On route he questioned me about the visit. I explained the hasty nature of the arrangements to which he panicked that it might go wrong. Was he about to disrupt a long-planned drama? Would the governors object? Would parents protest?



I told him and Diana to wait in the car while I checked out the reception he might receive. As I walked into the entrance most of the school's leadership and governors were lined up with their cameras to welcome the visit. Diana, a special needs teacher, was a natural with children and helped Prescott – and I'm sure the bemused children – have a great time. The enthusiasm demonstrated by that early visit was to carry the Party to victory five long weeks later as Diana was elected MP for the Forest of Dean and Labour took power.

Other leading politicians, including Tony Blair, came to the Forest of Dean during the election campaign. But the short trip to Coleford was not easily forgotten.

Schools' History Competition

The Forest of Dean Local History Society is keen to help children learn about the rich history of our Forest. All sorts of creative skills were demonstrated by Key Stage 2 pupils who chose to take part in the competition. They could decide whether to create a 3D model, a PowerPoint presentation, a video or a piece of writing. The subject of their work varied as they created something that had some personal meaning for them, so it was fascinating to see a wide range of sites, stories and experiences represented across the entries.

The winning entry for the 3D model category was the 'New Fancy Colliery 1827' created by Lily of Yorkley School, who wins £25 for herself. The judges were impressed by the amount of detail provided in the model, the number of different structures and its aged appearance.



Vice Chair Sue Middleton with Lily of Yorkley School (right)



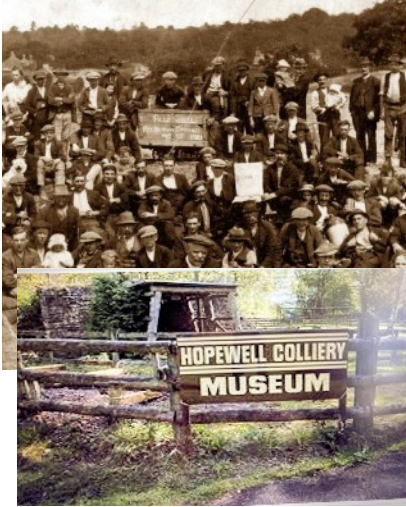
There were a lot of entries in the 3D model category and many of them must have taken hours and hours of dedicated construction time, so the judges also awarded 'Highly Commended' status to the Freemining Tunnel (below left) created by Willow of Parkend School, and the Darkhill Ironworks model created by Finn of St White's (bottom left)..



Willow of Parkend School with her model of a free mining tunnel

Schools' History Competition

In the PowerPoint category, the winner was Lyra of Parkend School who had created a very detailed study of 'Mining, the miners and Pillowwell Rec' and won £25. Our Freemining heritage also inspired a 'Highly Commended' entry in the PowerPoint category from Liam of Coalway Junior for his presentation all about Hopewell Colliery.



Mining, the miners
and Pillowwell Rec

Lyra
Year 3
Parkend School



Sue Middleton, teacher Gemma Screen, Sue Newton (FODLHS) and Winner Lyra.

The video category illustrated the skills of our film directors of the future and the winning entry was by Tilly for her excellent video about the Dean Forest Railway, so she wins £25. The judges commented that the video was so good, Tilly might like to offer it to The Dean Forest Railway or to 'Visit Dean Wye' (the Forest of Dean and Wye Valley Tourism Limited).

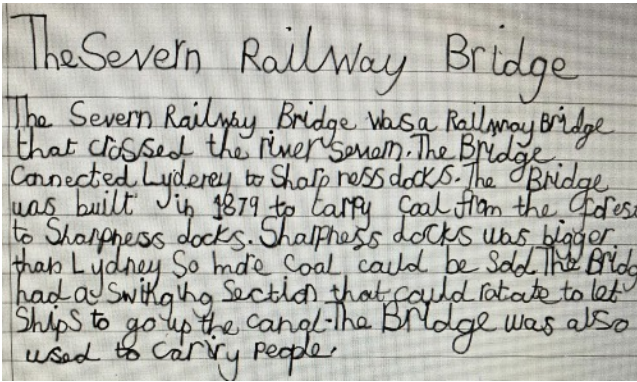


Sue Middleton, teacher Gemma Screen, Sue Newton (FODLHS) and Winner Tilly.



Schools' History Competition

Parkend School also produced the winner in the Writing category, who was Sophie, receiving £25 for her piece about 'The Severn Railway Bridge' (an extract from her article is shown below).



The Severn Railway Bridge

The Severn Railway Bridge was a Railway Bridge that crossed the River Severn. The Bridge connected Lydney to Sharpness docks. The Bridge was built in 1879 to carry coal from the forest to Sharpness docks. Sharpness docks was bigger than Lydney so more coal could be sold. The Bridge had a swinging section that could rotate to let ships to go up the canal. The Bridge was also used to carry people.



Sue Middleton, teacher Gemma Screen, Sue Newton (FODLHS) and Winner Sophie.



All the prize winners from Parkend School

There were two entries that the FODLHS judges felt were outstanding in the amount of detailed research they showed and they could not choose between them, so Lyra and Tilly are joint winners of the overall competition this year. Happily, they are both from Parkend School, so they have won £100 for their school.

The judges were really pleased with all the entries from schools in the Forest, as they show how much the children have learned about their local History and how good they are at employing all sorts of creative skills to bring that to life. The children received oak leaf badges to recognise their hard work in creating their entries and these were colour coded, so Green was for 'Highly Commended', Yellow was for winning a category and Orange was for the Overall Winners.

The funding for the cash prizes was provided by a legacy from Dr John Jurica of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society through the Gloucestershire Local History Association. This means that the Forest of Dean Local History Society looks forward to receiving many more entries in future years. Congratulations to all the winners!

Schools' History Quiz

In addition to the History Competition, this year the Forest of Dean Local History Society launched the History Quiz. This is also for Key Stage 2 pupils in Forest schools, but whilst the competition rewards individual efforts, the Quiz is about working together in teams of four.

Each round of the Quiz had four sections of questions: History, Pictures / Objects, Literature, Freemining. The quiz was organised in two phases with heats between schools and then the final.



Heat 1 was between Forest View & Yorkley. The photo shows the runners up, Yorkley School Team, Mary Sullivan, Sue Newton and Sue Middleton (FODLHS)

Heat 2 was between St White's & Parkend. The photo shows the runners up, Parkend School Team, Sue Newton and Sue Middleton (FODLHS)



The final was between Forest View and St White's. St Whites were the overall winners and the team is pictured below left after presentation of their 'Winners' certificates (they also received copies of 'The Story of the Forest'). The Forest View Team also each received a copy of 'The Story of the Forest' as 'Runners Up' (below right). St White's have the honour of being the first school to have their name engraved on the winners' trophy shield. They will be able to keep the shield in their trophy cabinet for the next year until the FODLHS History Schools Quiz comes around in Summer 2025.



Sue Middleton, FODLHS Vice Chair, commented, 'I was particularly impressed by the amount of Local History that the children have learnt about. It is great to see the enthusiasm that they have for learning about their Forest heritage as I'm hoping it will mean that they will be keen to protect it in future.'

Huge thanks to the various local experts who helped devise the questions (FODLHS Enquiries Officer Averil Kear, Joanne Clarke of Dean Heritage Centre, Dr Jason Griffiths of Reading the Forest, Rich Daniels of Hopewell Colliery and Dan Howell Deputy Gaveller, Forestry England). Thanks also to the teachers and other staff in the schools who helped host the quiz rounds and to FODLHS Committee members Keith Walker, Owen McLaughlin, Mary Sullivan and Sue Newton for all their help in recruiting schools and conducting the quiz..

Gaslighting Blakeney



The Square Blakeney in 1908. Note the Gas (or is it oil) lamp on the building (left).

We probably take for granted the electricity supplies that light our streets and homes today, but what of times gone by?

In the 19th century and earlier, any street lighting that might have existed was provided by oil lamps, with contingent regular oil reservoir refilling and wick trimming. The development of town gas as a viable distributable source of energy for lighting challenged the dominance of oil. No need then for regular refilling of oil reservoirs or wick trimming. A pipe network could also supply gas to houses and businesses to provide brighter lighting than was previously possible.

It is not surprising therefore that building a gas works and providing a distribution network was economically viable and indeed happened in local towns such as Coleford, Newent, Cinderford and Lydney. What is more surprising that a smaller community such as Blakeney would undertake such a venture.

The story starts in November 1866 when a meeting was held at the Bird-In-Hand Inn to consider the question of the introduction of gas into the village. Mr White, the chairman of the meeting deplored ‘the aspect of Blakeney during the winter months and considered that public and private lights were much needed’. A resolution was passed to the effect that a company should be formed, with shares priced at 10 shillings each.

The company built a gas works at Nibley and laid a distribution network. The business was a marginal one as the following extract from the Gloucester Citizen of 22nd November 1898 describes: “The Blakeney Gas company can hardly be called a flourishing one. With total income from all sources of £120, out of which wages, coal, and all expenses must be paid, it would seem hard to earn a dividend on a capital of £800, even though new mains have recently laid down and a large loss previously incurred by leakage prevented. Twenty years ago the gas bills alone reached £170, and a good profit was then made. There is no doubt that the real cause of the decline in the sale is the cheapness of mineral oil, and the number of vendors who hawk it door to door, even in the most out of the way villages. It is found in London that the ‘penny in the slot’ system of supplying gas has to a great extent counteracted this competition with oil. Gas cooking stoves have also helped to maintain an increased consumption, and in many places these are supplied by the gas company at a nominal rent and fixed free of charge, the profit being made on the gas they use. We recommend these ideas for the consideration of the Blakeney Gas Company....”

By 1904 the Directors of the Company were considering disposing of the gas works as they were disappointed “that so few people used the gas”. No decision was made. By June 1919 the gas supply had become irregular. The Gloucester Citizen of 6th September reported ‘a rumour that the private owner of the works was anxious to sell out rather than to close’. A deputation of consumers urged the Urban Council to buy, but a subsequent joint committee meeting favoured the formation of a private company.

The Blakeney Gas Company was apparently absorbed by the Lydney Gas Company in the late 1930’s. Nationalisation in 1948 resulted in 1,064 local gas undertakings being vested in twelve Area Gas Boards, each an autonomous body with its own chairman and Board structure.



*Location of the Gas Works at Nibley
(CC_BY NLS)*

Forest Recreation Grounds - Part 4 by Cecile Hunt

In the aftermath of World War One a scheme in the Forest of Dean was proposed by the Office of Woods to provide some land for 'recreational purposes' at Viney Hill and to be a local memorial of the fallen of the Great War. Similarly, the Angus Buchanan Recreation Ground at Coleford came into being after World War One. Angus Buchanan requested that funds collected to mark his bravery in the war, (he was awarded a Victoria Cross for action at Falauyah Lines), were used to give 'children somewhere to play'.

In 1925 'National Playing Fields Association' was founded by the Duke of York. A 'Forest of Dean Playing Fields Association' was founded in 1926. By 1931 it was looking at eighteen playing field schemes to be progressed in the Forest, *but* it announced that due to the number of schemes that had to be considered by the 'Works Committee', representatives of some schemes were reminded that '*...the Forest of Dean Playing Fields Association was by no means a lucky bag into which people could dip.*

Which villages had applied? By Monday March 23, 1931 the Works Committee reported that there were rather conspicuous vacancies in the list of applications to be presented to a 'Central body of the Works Committee'. They would look over and discuss as to which of the schemes would need modifying or be revised. According to the constitution of the Central body each committee with a scheme were entitled to two representatives.

Applications had been received from Blakeney, Clearwell, Sling and Worrall Hill. The Forest of Dean Playing Fields Association took the view that it probably could not progress all the schemes and remarked that *...the various committees must be prepared to do their share and work with the Central body*'. Blakeney's representative stated his area was in a very bad way and the 'price was too high' '*...it would be impossible for Blakeney to raise the necessary money*'. Clearwell's representative thought '*...that eventually ground would be secured*'.

The Miners' Welfare Committee had grouped together the districts of Ellwood, Sling, Milkwell and Clearwell, '*...it appeared necessary for a joint committee to represent these districts*'. Mr E Pritchard on behalf of Sling stated that while he had not a concrete scheme to put before the central council Sling very badly wanted a recreation ground. The site they were keen on was Scar, because it was an ideal spot for such a ground.

After a long discussion as to '*whether the committee should only accept Sling's application, since a Miners Welfare Committee was already in existence, on the understanding that one of the two representatives definitely came from Clearwell or whether they should be accepted as two separate bodies*', it was decided, 12 votes to 6, that Clearwell and Sling be accepted as separate bodies each having two representatives on the central committee.

After World War Two, January 1949 saw the Forestry Commission clearing an area of woodland at Worrall Hill. An idea had originated during the celebrations of the end of the war that it would be a great social improvement for the village if a recreation ground was acquired. Not all recreation grounds in the Forest have been covered by these articles but hopefully they have given you an incentive to find out the history of your local recreation ground.

In 2025 the National Playing Fields Association charity is 100 years old and the current President of the Association is William, Prince of Wales.



Sling Playing Fields today, managed now by Sling Playing Fields Association.

Meetings in Review *with Chris Sullivan & Sue Newton*



An attentive audience for Dr Rob Jones (right) at Raglan Castle

Self-drive visit to Raglan Castle, 15th May 2024

Last year, Dr Rob Jones guided us round Goodrich Castle. On a day you could accuse of being warm and sunny, this year it was Raglan Castle's turn.

Through successive rebuilding from the 1460s, Raglan became more of a fortified palace than a military castle. Its main tower was outside the rest of the defences. It came to have big windows looking on to ornate gardens by the early 1600s, with gun-ports placed for appearance rather than use. We should then think of it as an Elizabethan stately home, with Long Gallery, theatrical Grand Staircase, big lake, giant fountain and statues of Roman emperors. None of this would go well in the Civil War.

Rob got us to think about what old roof lines, changes in stone colour, or wall projections

might mean for structural changes. And to consider past usage. We know that butlers handled 'bouteilles', but what did a pantler handle? 'Pain', bread as a basis for a place setting, with the accounting for expenditure that went with it. Despite the wine-based family wealth, the Raglan household sounded a bit sober-sided. Perhaps the combination of lots of young men, few women and too much booze was seen as trouble waiting to happen.

The early parts of the castle were built for William ap Thomas after 1432. He had become wealthy by milking public office and marrying heiresses. His son adopted the English fashion of a surname, as William Herbert. Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, was a Yorkist fighter and wine merchant, until Yorkism got him executed and stopped the building works. This Herbert's grand-daughter took Raglan Castle into the Somerset family. Confusingly, husband Henry Somerset was both Baron Herbert and the Earl of Worcester, but not Pembroke.

Henry Somerset begat William, who begat Edward, the 4th Earl of Worcester. Edward was a favourite of Queen Elizabeth. Sir John Wintour was his son-in-law. From 1626, the 5th Earl continued to transform Raglan into a Renaissance house and garden. Like Wintour, the 5th Earl was a staunch royalist and Catholic. By 1642, King Charles had got him fundraising in the locality. Raglan's weak defences were improved, provisions stored, and the garrison steadily increased.

By August 1646, General Fairfax was trenching his way towards the castle defences, and bringing artillery in range. This presumably included 'Roaring Meg', released from taking Goodrich Castle that June. Rob showed the just-visible field marks of Fairfax's works to the few who made it up the Great Tower. Faced with this artillery, the castle surrendered while it could still get reasonable terms. The Earl died in prison, and a limited programme of 'sighting' – making the castle largely useless – happened. Worse damage was done by later Somersets using Raglan as an architectural salvage yard for their other estates, until the Marquess of Worcester/Duke of Beaufort/Baron Herbert thought of making Raglan Castle a high-class tourist attraction. This role developed once the Wye Tour got going. More on the Tour next New Regard...

Walk Around Gloucester Docks

Saturday 20th July

On Saturday 20th July, fifteen hardy and stoic members joined Chair John Lane for what turned out to be a very soggy but informative walk around Gloucester Docks. John once again demonstrated his extensive knowledge of the history of Gloucester during the walk, engaging his audience with some surprising facts and indeed numbers.

The 'magic number' of the day was '16', as John explained that the depth of the docks is sixteen feet, it is sixteen miles along the canal from Gloucester to Sharpness, and there are sixteen bridges over the canal between Gloucester and Sharpness.

Stopping outside the North Warehouse, John explained that the River Severn has been used as a trade route since at least Roman times, with the site of a Roman quay being located yards away from the present docks.

The party then made a stop by an unusual drinking fountain located at the north gate of Gloucester Docks, which was installed by the Gloucester City Board of Health at the bequest of merchants on behalf of their workers. Installed in 1863 this water supply was also used to fill ships' water casks. At the same location, the surviving window of an original coffee house was pointed out (see photograph).

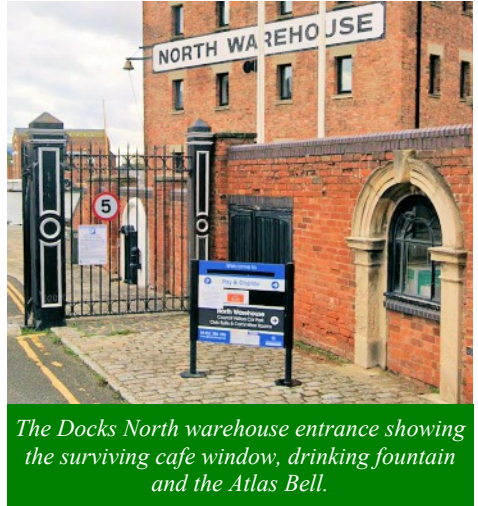
The Atlas Bell can also be seen in the photograph. The Bell came from the ship of the same name. After the ship was broken up in 1832 the bell was used in the Docks for signalling the dockers starting and finishing times. In 1941 the bell was moved to Shepperdine as a navigation aid in fog and was re-installed on the North Warehouse in 1986.

John then led the party to the lock between the docks and the River Severn. Originally built as a double lock with stop gates to prevent flooding from the River Severn, the lock opened for traffic in 1812. The party then moved southwards along the dock toward the two graving or dry docks, taking the chance to admire the boats currently under repair by Tommy Nielson & Company (Gloucester's own traditional ship builders and riggers).

Along the way the differing designs of the adjacent warehouses were examined. The old steam dredger was pointed out, specifically built in 1925 to dredge the Sharpness Canal and the Docks. As the canal is used as a water conduit to supply silty water from the Severn via pumps to Bristol Water's Treatment Works some twenty-three kilometres away at Purton, there is a continuing need to regularly dredge both the Docks and Canal.



Chair, John Lane, welcoming members to the walk.



The Docks North warehouse entrance showing the surviving cafe window, drinking fountain and the Atlas Bell.

Moving across Llanthony Bridge, the next stop was the restored Albion Cottages, where time was taken to admire the replica wagons on a section of the original track of the Gloucester and Cheltenham tramroad. The tramroad was originally opened in 1811 but suffered mixed fortunes financially.

The final stop was Back Badge Square (famously associated with the Gloucestershire Regiment), where the original Custom's House was admired. Now the building houses the Soldiers of Gloucester Museum, which is well worth a visit, detailing regimental history as far back as 1694.

S.N.

GLHA Afternoon in Coleford *by Mary Sullivan*



Coleford mayor Nick Penny welcoming attendees

After many months of planning for the GLHA afternoon event of 30th June it arrived and the weather was fortunately dry and bright. This was our opportunity to showcase to members of other local history societies from around Gloucestershire what is special about the Forest of Dean and Coleford in particular.

We hired the Main Place and 70 people arrived to see our displays and hear welcomes from both the Mayor, Nick Penny and the Chair of the GLHA, Sally Self. These were followed by an introductory talk about why Coleford grew up where it is, from our treasurer, Chris Sullivan. We were also fortunate enough to be joined by the Deputy Gaveler, Dan Howells who brought old mining maps and ledgers for people to see.

Next came outings. One group were led on a conducted tour of Newland Church by two of our vice presidents, Averil Kear and Cecile Hunt. Then three different walks set out. Simon Moore, conservation officer, dressed as a Victorian gent, led a group around the past and present locations of 36 pubs in the town. Sue Middleton, vice chair, led a longer walk to the Angus Buchanan recreation park and Whitecliff furnace. John Lane, Chair, did a get

to know Coleford walk around the town.

All the groups came back very satisfied and interested.

They then sat down to a slap-up afternoon tea prepared by Janet Marrott of the Coleford Area Partnership.



We were very grateful to the CAP for their support across the whole enterprise.

A first for a GLHA afternoon was that our editor, Nigel Costley, had prepared a special Coleford edition of the New Regard in double quick time to be on sale as a memory of the occasion. Every article is about aspects of the history of Coleford.

You can buy the Coleford Special New Regard now at the members' price of £7.50. See the enclosed order form.

In summary, it was a lot of hard work, but we were all very proud of how well we were able to entertain fellow historians from around the County and show off just how interesting is Coleford.