

FOREST OF DEAN LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

news
May 2018

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 Shaden Tuft Oak

May 2018

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Editors Notes

Welcome to the May 2018 edition! As is traditional now, this issue carries a bumper number of inserts in the centre pages. You can pull these out and cut appropriately. As if by magic you will then have all the booking and order forms you need to benefit from Society activities in the coming months.

Our Chair, Mary Sullivan, has been working very hard in this our anniversary year, and she has managed to secure Dame Janet Trotter as guest speaker at the 70th Anniversary Celebration Dinner to be held at the Speech House on Saturday June 30th. This will be an excellent chance for some sociable company amongst fellow members whilst we celebrate the longevity of the Society! You can find a booking form for the event in the middle pages.

Other special events have been arranged, including a weekend recognising the 50 years that have passed since the seminal book 'A Fortunate Man, The Story of a Country Doctor' was published. Described as a 'masterpiece of witness', the work of St Briaveal's GP, Dr. John Sassal, was probed in the book, which went on to gain international acclaim. During the weekend of 22nd - 24th June you can experience associated events at Soudley and St. Briaveals.

Member Di Standing has also put together a fascinating event, "A History of Underground Dean", which you can enjoy at Clearwell Caves during the evening of Thursday 19th July. If you do intend to go along please remember to let Cheryl Mayo know, so the catering can be properly organised for the evening.

More details of both of these events are contained in a pull-out in the centre pages.

Finally I must mention the Society's new publication, "The Forest at War". Focusing mainly on the home front during World War One, the book contains material developed from that produced for an exhibition at the Dean Heritage Centre in 2014, and other material originally published in the New Regard. Under the leadership of Cecile Hunt, a good number of members have been involved in producing material for the book. I also want to acknowledge the sterling work of Cheryl Mayo and David Harris, who worked so hard to make the book a reality. Thanks to both! And yes! - Special membership rates apply, and there is an order form for the book in the centre pages!

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.

Chair's Eye View - *with Mary Sullivan*

I can hardly believe that a whole indoor season has now passed since I took over the Chair. I have found the talks fascinating and varied and I hope you have too. We have learned about churches in Gloucestershire, the Forest railways at the time of nationalisation, a girls' school that took refuge in Lydney Park after the War, the still being rediscovered city of Trellech as well as gaining greater understanding from Andrew Taylor of how a historical novelist goes to work.

I am pleased that Andrew and his wife have also become members of the society as have quite a few other new people. Welcome to all of you.

But as well as the events you have seen, there has been much work behind the scenes by your committee members, such as finding more and different speakers and subjects for next year; and delivering the World War I book, of which I think we can all be proud. And what a good Christmas present that would make for anyone interested in Forest history!

Less glamorously, but just as important, committee members have worked hard to understand the new GDPR (data protection regulations) that come into effect in May and on preparing the society's Privacy Statement and revised membership forms. This was essential for us to meet the new legal requirements. I want to thank all my committee members for the enormous amount of dedicated time and effort they put in to making the society run so smoothly.



Castle Street, Cirencester

Photograph by Dave Crosby.

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Our 70th year continues and it will soon be time for our Anniversary Dinner at the Speech House on Saturday 30th June. All the details and order form are in this newsletter. I do hope at least 70 of you come to share what will be a very special and memorable evening. Please send in your forms as soon as you can so that final planning can be undertaken.

Additionally, you can sign up for the August coach trip and you will see details about the event "History of Underground Dean" at Clearwell Caves.

I hope to see many of you at all these events. But remember, our programme only happens because of the hard work of committee members. If you would like to get involved too just let me know.

Finally, may I remind you of the Gloucestershire Local History Association Annual Summer Meeting which this year takes place on Saturday 23rd June. The event, which is hosted by the Cirencester Historical & Archaeological Society, offers a choice of three interesting walks around Cirencester followed by afternoon tea.

Full details and booking forms for the event can be found online:

<https://www.gloshistory.org.uk/summer-meeting.php>



MEMBERSHIP

Thank you all for your continued support of our Society, which continues to grow with several new memberships this year bringing us to well over 300 individual members. We are pleased to offer a warm welcome to the following: Sheila Merrett, Roland Bott, Paul Baverstock, Christopher and Hilary Hill, Keith and Barbara Kendry, Philip

Richards, Andrew and Caroline Taylor, Kathryn and John Dawson, David and Karen Stiles, Rob Garner, Noreen Reynolds. We hope you all enjoy the benefits of being a member of our Society, especially in this very full 70th anniversary year.

In February, we heralded the introduction of changes to comply with the new data protection regulations. Our membership forms and relevant website details are now compliant, thanks to the detailed hard work put in largely by our secretary, Chris Sullivan. In fact, our approach has become an example for other societies. You will see the changes come renewal time when - a heads up - we will need a form from each of you, not just the majority! But we will make it easy, I promise.

Cheryl Mayo - Membership Secretary



Unsung Heroes of the History Society!

This occasional series features History Society members who do largely unseen work, and are therefore the unsung heroes of our Society. So let us introduce you to Gill Claydon!

For many years now Gill has annually produced an index for our journal, The New Regard. There are now over 30 volumes of The New Regard, and the index provides an essential resource for researchers, and helps sales of reprints of the New Regard.

You can download a copy of the index here: <https://www.forestofdeanhistory.org.uk/assets/PDF/New-Regard-Index-1-32.pdf>

Gill is also an invaluable member of the New Regard editorial team, as she provides proof reading skills to ensure an error free read. So we salute you Gill!

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Friday 22nd June to Sunday 24th June - at Soudley & St Briavels
“A Fortunate Man Revisited” - Film, Exhibition, Tour & Talks
See the insert in this newsletter for full details.

Saturday 30th June - 5’30pm - Speech House
70th Anniversary Dinner hosted by President Jan Royall
Booking essential - see the insert with this newsletter.

Thursday 19th July - 7’30pm - at Clearwell Caves
“A History of Underground Dean” - Film, Talk, Tour
Pre-book by email or phone - see the insert with this newsletter.

Barbara Griffith - Vice President of the FODLHS

A Tribute *by Averil Kear*



Sadly we have to note the death of Barbara Griffith on 5th February 2018. Barbara was born on 26th July 1933 in Llanelwedd, a small village immediately across the Wye from Builth Wells where her father was Rector. In 1935 the family moved to Crickhowell to live in a large rambling rectory with a large garden much enjoyed by Barbara, her sister Nesta and brother Glyn. Barbara's love of animals started here with cats, dogs and ponies.

Barbara went to a boarding school in Clevedon near Bristol and did well in her school certificate moving on to Bristol University to read English. Whilst at University Barbara joined the rowing club and rowed for Bristol. After graduation she trained to become a librarian and her first appointment was at Stroud library. She moved on to take charge of libraries at Winchcombe and Bishops Cleeve and was eventually given the position of area librarian for the Forest of Dean. At this time she moved to Newnham where she looked after her mother until she died in 1983. Barbara ended her career in charge of the extensive history collection at Gloucester Library.

Ian Standing notes that the first record of her joining the FODLHS Committee was in 1979. She became indoor meetings secretary in 1980. At that time the indoor meetings were followed by a formal sit down tea served by Coleford Community Centre and other venues. The tea was a monthly social event – perhaps somewhat more important than the talk. Barbara became chairman of the committee in 1981 with Ian as indoor meetings secretary. Between them they changed the formal tea into just tea and biscuits. New members arrived and the society flourished.

Ian and Barbara compiled a guide to local literature; published as *Neighbourhood Search* in 1981 by the library service. She was very active also with the then 'Forest of Dean Museum Project' which was organising and holding travelling exhibitions around the Forest and she was an active and long term member of the Dean Heritage Museum Trust. When Ian appealed for volunteers to help establish the Gage Library at DHMT, Barbara, together with Gill Claydon, undertook the cataloguing and care of the collection for many years.

After her retirement she became more involved with the Newnham on Severn community, joining choral groups and becoming churchwarden at St Peter's Church. She was also involved with Meals on Wheels and had great fun going into schools acting out bible stories with the children.

She set up the Newnham on Severn History Group, which met in members' homes fairly regularly to pursue projects. Barbara organised an exhibition on World War One and Newnham in August 2014 creating plaques that were placed on buildings throughout the village to indicate the family homes of Newnham servicemen (blue plaques for those who returned and black for those who did not). With Barbara's help Newnham History Group published the following books and articles:

- The Newnham Historical Collection.
- Guide to St. Peter's Church, Newnham,
- The Newnham Millennium Heritage Walk
- An article for the Forest of Dean Local History Society's journal *The New Regard* in 2001, entitled 'Newnham on Severn: A Century of Change'

Most of all Barbara will be remembered in Newnham and by members of the dog clubs for her love of dogs and her participation in their activities. When Averil worked at Lydney Library she remembers Christmas parties at Cinderford Library organised by Barbara. Always invited were her dogs who were given their own special Christmas presents. Barbara died at home with two of her dogs beside her.

Barbara's knowledge of the history of Newnham and its place within Gloucestershire was quite remarkable. She was a true historian and will be sadly missed.

Oaks, Rights & Riots - by *Paul Stephens-Wood*



The magnificent 'Charles II' oak

Sometimes I walk the dog from Parkend to New Fancy through the Churchill Inclosure. I always stop to see the three great oaks: The Forest Giant, The Charles II Oak and The Shaden Tuft Oak (shown on the front cover). As I rest my hand on the fissured bark, I think of the history of these great trees, and the turbulent times since their planting. It is a relatively short history, for these are not really ancient trees. Unlike the 1000 years old Newland oak, the largest common oak ever recorded (now sadly gone), these three are much younger. The Shaden Tuft Oak is thought to have been planted around 1599: the Charles II Oak and the Forest Giant, probably in the Seventeenth Century. These veteran oaks are the survivors of planting schemes to provide timber for ships; for the Forest of Dean was a principal source for the King's navy. But, there were always tensions and disputes about the rights of the Crown against those of the Foresters. The need for naval timber competed with charcoal production for the iron forges of Dean, and the rights of the Foresters to pannage. These veteran trees have lived through turbulent times.

Iron extraction had been under way for centuries, but keen to get as much revenue as he could from his Crown lands, James I contracted with the Earl of Pembroke at the beginning of the Seventeenth Century to set up a blast furnaces and forges in the forest. One was built at Parkend. Up until then, the Freeminers had enjoyed exclusive rights to mine the Forest and when this was removed disputes erupted. The King later became worried about the devastation caused by the huge quantities of charcoal needed to feed the forges, and its impact on the available sources of timber for the navy, so suspended the operation. But, the construction of furnaces and forges continued fitfully, making Dean the greatest concentration of iron works in the country.

Charles I, desperate for money after dissolving Parliament, sold the forest to Sir John Wintour, who operated from his mansion at Lydney. In 1640 Wintour paid the Crown £10,000 for all the mines, minerals, and stone-quarries in the Forest of Dean, together with rights to all the timber, trees, woods and underwood growing there. 18,000 acres of forest trees were felled to make charcoal. Again, this directly challenged the foresters ancient rights and there were riots in 1641. Wintour was stripped of his rights by Parliament at the end of the Civil War, but when the monarchy was restored in 1660, Charles II re-asserted Wintour's claims and he began again to strip the forest of its trees. The environmental destruction, though, led to national concerns for the disappearing supplies of timber for the navy. The King agreed with Parliament to demolish the ironworks at Parkend and Whitecroft, and by an Act of 1668, the forest was divided into 6 areas, each with a lodge and keeper tasked with protecting newly planted trees. The six new walks, which superseded the ten ancient bailiwicks as the main administrative units of the forest, were named the King's (or Charles II's) walk, York walk (after the king's brother), Danby walk (after the earl of Danby, the Lord Treasurer), Latimer walk (after another of the earl's titles), Worcester walk (after the constable, the marquess of Worcester), and Herbert walk (after another of the marquess's titles). By the later 18th century the King's walk was usually called Speech House walk, after the building that served as its keeper's lodge, and York, Danby, Latimer, and Herbert walks had become known, as Parkend, Blakeney, Littledean, and Ruardean walks, respectively.



The 'Forest Giant', another fine old Forest tree

The immediate threat to the forest was curtailed by the 1688 Act, but replanting trees meant enclosure. 11,000 acres were fenced to prevent grazing animals destroying the saplings. The foresters, with nowhere else to graze their animals, rioted and in 1688 destroyed the Keeper's lodge just to the north of Parkend. It was rebuilt, but the disturbances continued. Grazing animals, if found within the forbidden areas were impounded and the owners heavily fined. This led to continued resentment, and as late as 1735, newspapers were reporting that 'villainous gangs of persons' were breaking open the pounds to release their animals.

But for all the Kings' efforts there was little improvement in the supply of timber for the navy. When the Napoleonic wars broke out there was still a huge, largely unmet demand for timber. Nelson complained of the poor state of the trees and blamed the "vast droves of hogs allowed to go into the woods in autumn" that ate up all the acorns. So, again the Crown sought to enforce its right. Edward Machen became Deputy Surveyor of Dean in 1808 and set about planting oaks for the Crown around Whitemead Park and Parkhill Enclosure. In 1823 The Duke of Wellington rode over from Cheltenham and lodged in Whitemead Park to see for himself how the planting was going.

Unrest over fenced enclosures continued. Machen reported that several trees planted near Parkend and on Bream's Eaves had been 'wilfully cut off in the night', the plantation gates had been broken down and animals driven into the forbidden areas. In June 1831 Warren James called on the Foresters to destroy the walls and fences at Park Hill Enclosure. For several days nearly 2000 men, women and children joined in the destruction, which spread from Parkend to the rest of the forest. The Militia was called out from Monmouth, but the rioters were beyond their control, and they returned to barracks. Order was not restored until martial law was declared and enforced by dragoons from Merthyr Tydfil. Warren James was caught hiding in a coal pit in Bream and committed to trial at Gloucester Assizes. He was sentenced to death, later commuted to transportation to Tasmania, where he died in 1841.

The quelling of the riots did nothing to improve the plight of Foresters. They were unable to hunt or remove timber from the forest, and they had lost many ancient grazing and mining rights. The Industrial Revolution brought a rapid increase in population as outsiders came to work in the new mines, forges and quarries. Over the Nineteenth Century the area around Parkend was filled with coal mines, iron works, stamping mills, tinsplate works, lime kilns, brick kilns, stone and wood saw mills. They brought employment, but also poor working conditions. It was not until the beginning of the Twentieth Century that conditions in the different industries began to dramatically improve the lives of the foresters, but by then these industries were becoming uneconomic and were being closed down. The irony was that by the

mid Nineteenth Century timber was no longer required for the construction of naval vessels. They were made from iron instead, and more efficient coke furnaces replaced charcoal. There was less pressure on the trees

By the early Twentieth Century most of the heavy industry was gone, and this part of the forest became the tranquil woodland we know today. The three veteran oaks are all that remain from the plantations of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries. They are silent witnesses to the struggles that have convulsed the forest over the past 300 years.

CAUTION.

WHEREAS,

It has been represented to the Inhabitants of Dean Forest by ignorant or designing persons, that the Enclosures are not lawfully made or kept enclosed. This is to give Notice, for the Information of those who might otherwise be misled, that the Enclosures are made under an Act of 48th Geo. III. cap. 72, the provisions of which are the same as the 20th Charles II. cap. 3, and can only be thrown open by the authority of the Lords of the Treasury, who are authorised, when they shall think the Timber out of danger of browsing of cattle, &c. to throw open such part as they shall think fit, and order an equal quantity of the Waste to be enclosed, so that 11,000 Acres shall be always set apart as a Nursery for Timber.

To lay open the Enclosures in any other manner is unlawful, and, therefore, if three or more persons shall assemble for such purpose, all that are present will be guilty of a riot; and this Notice is given, that persons may not unwarily join such an unlawful assembly, and that the innocent may be safe and the guilty punished.

EDWARD MACHEN.

Whitemead Park, June 6, 1831.

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FOREST of DEAN.

Take Notice, that the **FREED**

MINERS of the said Forest, intend to MEET on Wednesday next the 7th instant for the purpose of OPENING the FOREST, and their RIGHT of COMMON to the same, so long deprived of and All those Persons who may chance to have Stock thereon contrary to the Rights and Privileges of the Miners, are required hereby to remove the same forthwith otherwise they will have their Stock impounded without Further Notice.

Dated this 3rd day of June 1831. *WARREN JAMES.*

Iron Production in the Dean (Part 2) by Cecile Hunt



Derelict warehouse where 'The Cut' drains into the River Lyd at the upper basin of Lydney Docks

Picking the August 2014 coach trip back up at Middle Forge, New Road, Lydney; which is possibly the site of, or near the site of, a mill called Over Mill built by Sir Edward Winter shortly before 1600.

The Lower, Middle and Upper forge became known as Lydney Iron Works. The lease of the works changed hands several times over the centuries. By early 1800's Lydney Iron Works were leased by the Pidock family who, in 1810, offered for sale by auction their lease of the works, but it was withdrawn at the auction. They sold back the lease to the Bathursts in 1813.

The Pidock family's involvement with Lydney Ironworks left us with a canal that is still visible today from Middle Forge

down to the top basin of Lydney Docks. This narrow canal known as 'Pidcocks' Canal', linked the three sites, Upper, Middle and Lower.

Along it barges carried materials from one site to another, the forges were also linked by a tramway along the Lyd valley which offered further advantages. Pidocks Canal (latterly known as 'The Cut') has disappeared between Upper and Middle Forges but from Middle Forge it still runs through Lydney, going under the main road just below Lydney Town level crossing, alongside the railway by St Mary's church Lydney and on to the upper basin of the docks. The tramway was between the railway and the River Lyd or Newerne stream.

Continuing along the valley to Whitecroft; on crossing the railway before continuing onto Parkend look straight ahead, in the distance there is a canopy sticking out - for those of you who know Whitecroft it is just in front of the fish & chip shop. The grey building the canopy is attached to and the derelict buildings on the opposite side of the road to it is the site of a private forge built in 1628/9, it was 70 foot long and 28 foot wide and had two hammers, various out buildings and a floodgate with a horse bridge made over it. The forge partly burnt down in about 1632 but was rebuilt only to be destroyed in 1644 during the English Civil War. A new forge was built in 1654, this one was partly demolished in 1674, what was left became a corn-mill.

The Forest retained its place as the chief seat of the English iron trade well into the 14th century.

In 1640 the whole of the forest and all its ironworks and mines were leased to Sir John Winter of Lydney - this caused general unrest amongst the people of the Forest and its adjacent areas.

In 1662 it was suggested by the Barons of the Exchequer that the King should take in hand all the furnaces and forges in the Forest of Dean and reap the income. But the King was unimpressed, as by now Surrey and Sussex were supplying the iron trade and they had easier access than the Forest. The suggestion was refused and the Crown directed that the 'Kings' Forest furnaces or King's Ironworks were to be demolished

Long gone now, the King's Ironworks consisted of four blast furnaces located at Parkend, Soudley, Lydbrook and Cannop plus three forges at Parkend, Lydbrook and Soudley; these were constructed around 1612 by Sir William Herbert, third Earl of Pembroke on ground leased to him by the Crown; the Kings Ironworks lasted for 64 years.

Next time Parkend - not the quiet, clean village of today.

Highway Robbery in the Dean in 1849!

'Highway robbery' was still a fairly common crime in Victorian times, and the Forest of Dean had occasional instances of it. The Bristol Times and Mirror of Saturday 21st July 1949 carried the following piece:

"As C. Greenham, Esq. of Lydney, one of the proprietors of the Coal and Iron Works, Cinderford, was proceeding between eleven and twelve o'clock on Saturday week, along the old Roman road between Stapledge and Blakeney Hill, near Blackpool Bridge, East Dean, having at the time as much as £120, in his pocket in order to pay the men employed in his mines, he was accosted by seven men, disfigured with masks, apparently armed with bludgeons, and one of the party, holding up a bludgeon and closely followed by the rest, ran towards Mr Greenham, who instantly put spurs to the horse, and galloped off. Upon this the men threw the bludgeons after him. Mr Greenham immediately heard two reports of fire-arms discharged by the party, and as soon as he could he gave information of the circumstances at the Littledean Police Station, and three constables proceeded to the place of the attack. On the inside of the Blakeney Hill Enclosure were the marks in the grass where the men had been lying in ambush. The Police obtained information of a man who had been seen near the spot about two o'clock, under suspicious circumstances, and after pursuing him for some distances they apprehended him, and found a large ball for a gun, and a piece of paper which had grains of gunpowder in it, in his pocket. He gave his name as James Davis, and was brought up on Monday before J. Pyrke, Esq. at Newnham, and remanded by him for a week. A reward of £50, has been offered for the apprehension of the offenders."



Charles Greenham is listed in contemporary census's as being an 'ironmaster'. He was born in Yeovil in 1798, and is shown as living at Highfield House, Lydney. He died in 1866 and was buried in Lydney churchyard. A contemporary Pigot's directory shows that Charles Greenham had a living as a glove manufacturer in Yeovil, but by 1847 he was living in Lydney as his father in law, John James, had made him manager and then a partner in the Park End ironworks.

Thanks to Dave Tuffley for providing the cutting from the newspaper.



Can You Help Save A Painting Of David Mushet?

David Mushet (1772-1847) the pioneering metallurgist was born in Scotland but will be forever associated with the Forest of Dean, the Whitecliff furnaces and Darkhill Works, where he carried out experimental and pioneering production methods. Ralph Anstiss recognised him as one of the most significant figures in his field during his lifetime. He is buried at Staunton. In the twentieth century much of the development work in steel manufacturing moved to Sheffield and with it travelled a portrait of the famous metallurgist.

A colour painting of David Mushet sat in the boardroom of Osborn's steel plant in Sheffield until the 1980s, when the contents were dispersed. The picture was reproduced as a black and white plate in a book by Fred Osborn,

former Chairman of Samuel Osborn and Co., *The Story of the Mushets*. The painting was lost and has now appeared on the art market requiring some restoration and framing, and has been offered to the Dean Heritage Centre. LHS members Ian Standing and Roger Deeks are working with Dean Heritage Centre to raise funds to buy, restore and create an exhibit around this important portrait. If you would like to donate or help this project please go to:

<https://make-a-donation.org/campaign/david-mushet-painting-exhibit> or contact Ian or Roger.

Meetings in Review *with John Powell*

The war was over and the Yanks were leaving in a hurry. So, according to legend, what was too heavy was too hot. Stories abounded of abandoned equipment simply disposed of by being tipped into old mine air shafts. You name it, the Americans dumped it... pianos, motorbikes, yes, and even kitchen sinks! But it was the ammo that most interested we kids. Never mind that the fighting had ended a decade or so ago; that all the wartime restrictions on access to ‘secret’ parts of the Forest had been lifted, it was a definite fact that HE (high explosives) were still tucked away in forgotten corners and that hand grenades were ten-a-penny in Acorn Patch. No-one ever found a thing but it was all true, HONEST...our dad’s cousin worked for the Forestry and he reckoned “yups o’ stuff” was buried. So be careful where you walk!

Those happy days were vividly sparked to life by society vice-president Ian Pope at our February meeting. As anticipated, Ian easily filled Bream’s West Dean Centre as he told of the complex network of railways still operating in the Dean at the end of the Second World War. The Severn and Wye lines, the track to Bullo and the Mineral Loop line were all dealt with, and along the way there were many tales to tell relating to the early days of the system; the wartime railway and the role of tunnels such as those at Moseley Green and Drybrook, and the changes which swiftly followed as the great regional railway companies fell to nationalisation. Mr Pope explored the role of Harry Parr, author of the two books which define the Forest railways, and of the photographer L E Copeland who regularly cycled from his home in Gloucester to delve into every corner of the Dean’s railway system. Copeland’s super shots formed the backdrop to a fascinating 90 minutes. There were many asides to the story but one Mr Pope told referred to the loyalty of many railwaymen, who, even though the war was years behind them, were reluctant to say even a word about what happened in the Forest between 1939 and 1945. The reason: They had signed the Official Secrets Act!



*North Foreland Lodge logo
and motto:
“To do good and be happy”*

Well-to-do they may have been, but being a pupil at North Foreland Lodge — an independent boarding school for girls — meant much more than daily studies, and especially so when one was a guest in a Forest of Dean mansion. Never heard of NFL before? Vice-president Averil Kear shone a bright light on a time of darkness in our history to tell the story of a school which, to escape German bombs, was shifted from the south-east to the south-west of England, ending up at Lydney Park, the home of Lord Bledisloe. And what a fascinating story it was. With the aid of slides, Averil painted a fly-on-the-wall insight into the way things really were for girls who were living — in the words of one — in isolation. The picture painted was of a tight fit as the story is told in a series of diary entries made by the pupils themselves.

Emphasising the girls’ wealthy backgrounds, there is a telling description of the Bledisloe house as “modest by stately home standards...it had about 16 bedrooms, a ballroom, reception rooms,

stables, outbuildings and a cricket pavilion. Into these premises 50 girls and their educational paraphernalia had somehow to be fitted.” But Averil’s was a far from grim tale of toil and torment. Indeed, the school seemed not only to survive but thrive under a wartime motto of ‘Adapt or Perish’! There was little time to spare. Keeping fit meant a run around the house every day, cutting wood (which was known as logging), and half-term potato picking with “red earth everywhere.” A memory for everyone appeared be “a more or less perpetual water shortage”. The pupils found this odd as they were allowed just two baths a term while the pigs were hosed down daily!

The afternoon was rounded off with the concluding part of Keith Walker’s super film on the construction of the Second Severn Bridge (keep saying it, it’s the third). What a cracker this has been and one sure to be aired again as milestones come along.

Don't ask how we arrived at the subject of how to skin a rabbit (our conversation had previously been all about catching moles), but a History Society member was explaining how, a couple of decades ago, she had been taught the old country skill by her father.

We were enjoying a cuppa after the superb talk at Coleford Baptist Hall by author Andrew Taylor on the subject of writing an historical novel. And what we were talking about was just the stuff our man gobbled up! Andrew explained how it was a comfortable enough decision to set a story in, say, the 1950s, but quite another matter to create "plausible authenticity" — in other words the art of thinking the way people did in that age. Those who can remember that far back may, for a moment, think that nothing much has changed. But, of course, almost everything has! A pig's head, brawn, trotters... everything but the squeak ended up in the oven! There's none of that in our modern day and age.



Eminent local author Andrew Taylor

Attention to detail was key in Andrew's research. Our ancestors, even in recent times, saw things differently from us and it was important not just to get the correct physical settings but to see the world through the eyes of the people living in that age. Andrew revealed how the idea for his Lydmouth detective mysteries — based largely on the towns of Coleford, Monmouth and Lydney — had suddenly come to him as he and his wife were driving through the Forest. The series now extended to eight novels and keen followers will be delighted that more are planned! His grand total of published books now stands at 45 with one of his latest, *Ashes of London*, an international best seller. Its sequel, *Fire Court*, was launched in Coleford last month.

Stuart Wilson, the archaeologist who backed his hunch and found the so-called 'lost' city of Trellech, would make great company on a countryside walk. Here's a man who 'reads' fields. Humps and bumps might reveal buildings, paths can become lanes, lanes can become roads and, where they narrow, even have toll houses; while hedgerows and even the width of fields can give the game away and lay bare the bones of a row, even a street, of houses.

With a large audience gripped by his hour-long account of uncovering Trellech, the society's April meeting at the West Dean Centre, Bream, turned out to be an informative and inspirational afternoon. Hands up who wouldn't like a go at being a landscape archaeologist?

Stuart described how a paucity of evidence meet the early attempts to find archeology. However, his hunches were backed by photographs taken from the air and by the careful observation of fields. Indeed, he was so convinced of what was about to be discovered he really did put his money where his mouth was: He bought the field!

His ambitious archaeological adventure is now shining a light on a lost world which, over ten years, has revealed an important medieval manor house, a round tower and a well. Stuart revealed how he believed the settlement had played an important part in shaping the history of Wales, and also the role the nearby Forest of Dean had played in its development. A grand talk ended with a number of members expressing interest in a conducted tour of the site. Fingers crossed!

The meeting marked the launch of the Society's book on the role of the Forest of Dean during the First World War. Cecile Hunt, the Treasurer and a leading light in the project, told members how the book had come to fruition and outlined its contents. It's a great read and offered, of course, at a special price to members. Don't miss the opportunity!

Discovering Social History through Inventories

by Terry Moore-Scott

I was interested to discover that Gloucestershire Archives hold a number of probate inventories relating to residents in my home village of Minsterworth during the 17th and 18th centuries. The systematic details contained in the inventories can provide an intimate knowledge about the lives of ordinary working people and the homes they lived in. It appears that some homes had only one and a half floors, others two floors. Invariably on the ground floor there was the “hall” and adjoining it a “kitching”, which in one and a half floor houses may well have been open to the roof. Above the “hall” in a one and a half floor house would have been the “chamber” where the whole family slept. A cottage with full second floor would have had at least one more “chamber” or bedroom over the kitchen. In many cases, the chambers, apart from being sleeping quarters, would also have been used to store crops like barley, barrels of cider etc! From the forty odd inventories recorded, I have picked just one to give you an example of the wealth of information provided (word spellings as in the original text – have fun trying to decipher them!).

“A true and perfect inventory of all the goods of Sarah Phelps, widow, of the parish of Minsterworth who deceased September 5 1721.

In the Halle, 1 joynt cupboard, 1 long table, 4 joynt frame-stools & chaiers, 1 ovill table, 2 cobirons, two salts, one earthen dish, 2 small earthen dishes, 1 doz: and halfe of trenchers, one spinning whele, one reele, 2 reepehooks, 1 bar & cheeks.

In the Kitching, Eleven dishes of pewter, 2 pewter porringers, halfe a doz: of plates, one pewter tankard, 3 pewter spoons, 2 pewter candlestiks, one dripping pan, 2 pastypans, one tining cover, 2 spitts, 2 basting spoons, one toasting iron, one flesh fork, 1 paier potthooks, one chopping knife, one fire shoule and tongues, one trnell, 2 andions, one chafeing dish, one bellis, 1 salt box, 1 crane and links, one table and frame, 7 chaiers, 1 pick, 1 joynt stoole, one bacon rack.

In the Halle Chamber, 1 fether bed and bedsted, 2 bolsters, 3 pillos, 2 blanketts, 1 rug with the curtians and vallins, one other bed and bedsted, 2 bolsters, one pillow, 2 blankets, one rug.

In the Chamber over the Kitchin, one flock bed and bedsted, two bolsters, one payer of blanketts. Wheate thrashed in the house 3 bushells, 1 bushell, 1 peck, one half peck, 6 payer of sheets, 15 napkins, 3 tableclothes, 4 pillow bears, 1 warming pan, 8 coars towels, 5 paire hairebags, 1 bushell and halfe of pease, 2 cobions, 1 saddle, 1 cieve.

In the Ringhouse, two brass kettles, 2 bellmetal potts, two bellmetal skilletts, one chese ring, one iron bar.

In the Day house, 2 brass kettles, 9 milk pans, two skells, 1 churne, 3 milking pailles, one chese roule, one butter basket, one frieing pan, one serche, one haier cieve, chese vates, one skimmer, a plank for salting of bacon with other things relating [to a] dayery.

In the Shop, 1 waine roap, one spinning whele, 1 payer of potts, 1 pad, one spitting shovel, one dough skeele, 1 payer scales with an iron beame, one saie, 9 hogshheads, 2 barrells, 1 kinderkin, 1 pipe, 3 tubs, 2 washtubs.

Plowtack of all sorts. The muss mill & screws and press. The cistern at the well and thatching ladder. One half acre of wheate. One payer of gears with the tallet pole and lumber.

Total value: £28 00s 02d “



Lyn Paddock Cottage Minsterworth is a late 17th century cottage which probably started life having just one and a half floors.

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