

# FOREST OF DEAN LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

*news*  
May 2025



## Inside

- 'Books' special edition - reviews and more
- The Chair announces a new wood
- "Where The Poppies Grow" - a new memorial in the Cyril Hart Arboretum
- The Draw of the Holly Wood

The Forest of Dean  
Local History  
Society

# News

May 2025

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## Editors Notes

This edition features a mix of books and trees!

There have been a number of book reviews and notifications about new books sent to me recently, which are featured in this edition.

Nigel Costley has written a substantial review of Dave Organ's book 'Pit Stop'. The book contains a wide ranging history of the Foresters' who 'lived, worked and died harvesting the mineral resources of the Dean'. Nigel's forensic review is in the centre pages.

For the railway enthusiasts amongst you, get on board with Chris Sullivan to read his review of the new edition of Dean Forest Railway Museum Trust's book, 'Rails to the Forest'. Chris's review provided the excuse for a photo on the front cover of ex GWR locomotive 1450 passing Oakenwood on Dean Forest Rails in 2008.

The ever productive social historian Ian Wright has produced a new book examining the activities of John Williams and the Dean Forest Miners Association through the turbulent period of the 1920's. More on this in the centre pages.

Finally Pete Rochford provides a potted description of how he came to write his biography of Joe Meek titled 'Behind Closed Doors'. The book is currently sold out, but may be reprinted. You can learn more about Joe Meek by joining Pete on his guided walk around Newent on Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> August or by coming to his talk on Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> November.

Thanks to Nigel, Chris, Ian and Pete for their contributions.

Now for the trees! Our Chair has some exciting and unusual news (opposite) about a new wood being added to the Forest of Dean. Cecile Hunt has an intriguing piece about 'The Draw of the Holly Wood', when 19<sup>th</sup> century travellers would come to the Forest of Dean to enjoy the 'Delicia Sylvarum'. I guess we still do that today, although I suspect the numbers of holly trees is sadly much reduced.

Finally you will find on the back cover, a piece by Mrs R N C Godwin reminds us of the heroic stand of the 'Glorious Glosters' in the Korean War, and the efforts being made to provide a memorial at the Cyril Hart Arboretum to the Forest 'Glosters' involved in the campaign.

*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

Historic News! The Forest of Dean is getting a little bigger! Many of you will know that the boundary of the Forest of Dean has fluctuated somewhat over the centuries, but it hasn't changed much in recent times.

That is about to change as Forestry England plan to create a new woodland on 88 hectares of land at Hoarthorns Farm, Edge End near Coleford, next to existing woodland at Ninewells. This new woodland is one of many Forestry England are creating around the country to grow the nation's forests, as part of plans to plant at least 2,000 hectares of new woodland by 2026.

It is believed that the 'Forest of Dene' was first named around the year 1080 and harsh Forest laws introduced by the Normans persisted during the 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. In the 13th century the area of land subject to the forest law was that contained between the rivers Severn and Wye, extending northwards as far as Ross on Wye, Newent and Gloucester. Over the centuries there were several revisions in the boundaries of the area. After 1833 the boundaries of the Forest of Dean (the statutory forest) were restricted to the 'royal demesne'. Much ancient woodland was destroyed to make charcoal for the iron industry in the 16th and 17th centuries, and iron forges were closed down by royal decree on several occasions to safeguard the growing timber stock. A policy of enclosure was begun in the 1660s to enable the production of shipbuilding timber. The policy lost momentum during the 18th century, but large new enclosures were introduced in the 19th century and planted with oak trees. Conifers were introduced into the Forest on a large scale in the 19th century and Conifers were also the preferred species to plant in the 20th century so would have become the predominant species in the Forest until a policy change in 1971, when it was decided to retain equal proportions of conifer and broad-leaved trees.

As with all Forest Plans, Forestry England have key objectives to meet:

- Create a mixed, productive and resilient woodland
- Improve connectivity for wildlife across woodland areas in the landscape
- Provide additional opportunities for informal access to the countryside
- Capture carbon, improve soil and air quality, supporting Government in achieving net zero emissions targets

The new woodland will be publicly accessible and will be valuable for people, wildlife and timber. As the plans for the new woodland are at an early stage, Forestry England are keen to hear from local people, so they are planning a public consultation process in Spring 2025.

In other good news, Sue Newton (School's Liaison Officer) continues to work hard on promoting the 2025 Schools' Competition and Schools' Quiz. It currently looks like we will have 11 schools entering the competition, and 10 joining the quiz, so the competitions continue to grow year on year.



*Sue Middleton*





## Membership

As I write this, Spring has now definitely sprung, and we have just two indoor meetings before the summer break. I hope the warmer weather will now allow us all to enjoy more time outside at summer events and walks.

New members have increased steadily since the beginning of the year, and I would like to extend a warm welcome to Piers Camp, John Slater, Patrick Kyne, Mike Barnsley, Hazel Wheeler and Laura and Richard Taylor. We hope you enjoy your membership and look forward to seeing you at forthcoming events.

Please let me know if you change your postal or email address, especially important so I can send out timely reminders for Society events, or other information which becomes available after the newsletter has been published, and of events from other organisations that I think will interest you, such as from Heritage Hub, GLHA, and other Local History Societies.

Also, if you haven't been receiving my reminder emails a few days before each Society meeting, it is possible I have an incorrect or outdated email address for you, so please let me know so I can update the database.

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

## Forthcoming Events

### Guided Walk Around Newnham - 6<sup>th</sup> July 2025

By popular demand on Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> July 2025 at 2pm the Society has arranged a guided walk around Newnham, when Cecile Hunt will be leading the walk. It is a Self-Drive meeting.

Newnham has a myriad of built and social history to discover. It was one of the five ancient boroughs of Gloucestershire. A ferry was recorded herein 1238 running until the mid-20th century. A busy port trading in timber, bark and hides which moved through it from the Forest to Bristol; glass and cider was sent to, in the main, Ireland. Henry II sailed from the town in 1170 to invade Ireland. The Church has been rebuilt several times between 1230 and 1881; learn where the river side road has gone; how Newnham Pill affected the lower end of Newnham; what lies behind the modernisation of the building frontages on the High Street and much more - come and find out.

The walk will not all be on the flat, Newnham is built on a hill! There will also be some uneven, undulating, walking on non-tarmacked paths - please wear suitable footwear.

To book a place on this walk please email Cecile on [meetings@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk](mailto:meetings@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk).

**Maximum 20 places available. Bookings will be on a first come basis**

Members free. Non-members £4

If you are successful you will be contacted and given details of where to meet and when/how to pay.

**Please do not turn up without having booked a place or received confirmation email.**

## Guided Walk Around Newent - 17<sup>th</sup> August 2025

On Sunday 17th August 2025 at 2pm the Society has arranged a guided walk around Newent, with Peter Rochford, based on Joe Meek's life and times. It is a Self-Drive meeting.

It will provide a gentle walk around Newent town lasting for approximately an hour stopping at various locations that are connected to Joe Meek and his family; most of which are very close to each other. The tour will include business, personal - song writing and private locations; each telling their own stories.

The tour gives information from early life in the 1930's to the 1960's with the final location on the tour being the furthest. If anyone has mobility issues, it is recommended driving to the last location on the walk which is the cemetery in Watery Lane. During the walk/tour there will be time for any questions. The tour is free of charge, however donations to Pete will be gratefully received. Pete hopes that everyone who attends will find it of much interest.

To book a place on this walk please email Cecile on [meetings@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk](mailto:meetings@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk)

**Maximum 20 places available. Bookings will be on a first come basis**

If you are successful you will be contacted and given details of where to meet and park in Newent.

**Please do not turn up without having booked a place or received a confirmation email.**

### 'Joe Meek - Behind Closed Doors'

*How I wrote the new biography - by Pete Rochford*

Over the course of two years, I assembled everything I have researched on Joe Meek into a book. With all my past research of over 30 years, I gathered everything together and began to put all the notes into chronological order and began writing. The writing started on 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2023 and was completed on 6<sup>th</sup> October 2024 and sent to the printers for copies to be printed. The biography was on sale for just 20 days before selling out, a second reprint of copies were ordered and again sold out before they had been delivered to me.

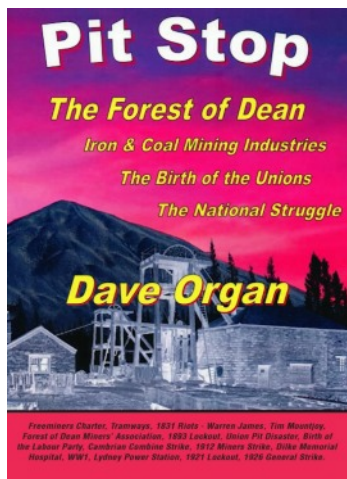
My biography is unlike any other published book on Joe Meek as I had dug deeper than anyone else into the personal and early life of Joe in Newent, including detailed information on the Meek family, giving an insight of how life was for Joe while still very young. My biography provides in depth details going through his teen years, into the RAF and finding employment in and around Newent on return to civilian life, information that took some considerable time to find. Over the past 10 to 20 years, I was very fortunate to be given information about Joe's time in London, where he worked, including in-depth memories from those who had worked with him, most of which had never been told before, covering the years from 1955 to 1959. After 1960, my biography goes into an in depth and detailed journey of his success as an independent record producer and through to his decline, with his personal issues and setbacks in the music industry. The final chapter of my biography uses more exclusive information that I received in 2021 concerning Joe's death; from a confession that uncovers a more plausible explanation about the end to Joe's life, evidence that will hopefully clear his name, not just for Joe himself but for comfort for both the Meek and Shenton families.

Although my biography has now sold out, if there were to be any further interest in another reprint, I would not hesitate in ordering more copies to be printed.

***Pete Rochford will give a talk on the life of Joe Meek at the History Society meeting on Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> November.***



## 'Pit Stop' Book review by Nigel Costley



Dave Organ has written a comprehensive account of the struggles that miners went through during the industry's hey days in the Forest of Dean. As the grandson of David Organ, the former president of the Forest of Dean Miners' Association, he is well placed to produce such a book. *Pit Stop* tells of the twists and turns of miners and their unions charting the battles to make a better life – or hold on to what they had.

The story is told in chronological order and lists all the accidents and fatalities that are recorded. As such the book covers a lot of ground – perhaps too much. It sets the national context for many of the local issues as reported at the time and strays into the history of Welsh mining too.

It would have been a much better book with a good edit and tighter focus. The misuse of capitals and switching between bold, roman, italic and underlined text is distracting.

But leaving that aside . . .

As a strong trade unionist and former Regional Secretary of the South West TUC, I was pleased to read *Pit Stop*. It highlights the hard work done by miners in building a collective response to the rich and powerful mine owners. It doesn't gloss over the difficulties faced and charts the periods of decline and defeat; of war and peace and shows how much mining has formed the character of the Forest of Dean.

Miners put their lives on the line every day and the list of deaths in the book is a constant reminder of the risks they were forced to take for meagre wages. The solidarity at work this forged helped build the strong communities and working class culture across the Forest.

To turn that spirit into sustainable unions that could bargain with powerful employers took a lot of hard work by people such as Dave's grandfather and the various miners' agents.

The book describes the early battles such as the 1893 lock-out when employers sought to impose a 25% wage cut.

The meetings of miners, often at Speech House could involve some 3,000 miners. The book charts the annual demonstrations, organised by the union with added attractions of a fun fare, local brass bands and other entertainments.

David Organ was elected Vice President of the local miners but as chair of the grand annual demonstration, he sometimes had to fight to help speakers be heard over the heckling. Miners won a minimum wage but it caused as many problems as it solved. David Organ would make a regular appeal for all miners to join the union. In 1914 a suffragette interrupted proceedings and faced cries of "Duck her" and "Throw her out".

The book tells of the impact of the First World War on miners in the Forest. At the start there were enthusiastic meetings to rally recruits to the military. 1,350 joined up to the new 13<sup>th</sup> (Forest of Dean) Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment. This cut the mining labour force and pushed wages up.

Britain needed coal but the government decided to 'comb-out' some 20,000 men from the industry to fight in the war. The following year, a further 50,000 men were taken. The fragmented nature of the coal industry was so inefficient to meet the war effort the government took over control.

*Pit Stop* describes how miners contributed to local funds for injured soldiers as well as raising funds for the proposed Dilke Memorial Hospital.

Miners enjoyed a brief period of rising wages but as the immediate post-war boom turned into downturn they had to resist pay cuts and longer hours. The 1921 lock-out proved a savage experience for the Forest of Dean community.

In 1925 the Triple Alliance held firm and the government offered large subsidies to prevent wage cuts. These ran out on 1<sup>st</sup> May 1926. The government prepared for the prospect of a general strike. The miners elected a new, militant leader, AJ Cook. He was a great orator and rallied miners around the demand of not a “penny off the pay, not a minute on the day”.

The book reflects the course of the strike and its sudden end, leaving the miners to fight on alone for nearly a year. *Pit Stop* makes no assessment of the dispute. It will soon be a century since the strike and it is still hard to debate the failings on all sides in the trade union movement.

The book doesn’t reflect on the stance of the miners’ union that left no room for a negotiated settlement. Many unions, required by their rules to provide strike pay, faced bankruptcy and many workers feared losing their jobs. Representing members who had taken pay cuts, they regretted locking themselves into a strike with no obvious conclusion.

For the miners, the end of the General Strike was a betrayal – a view that has echoed down the decades. Whatever the views of historians looking back on the General Strike, its aftermath was disastrous for the Forest of Dean miners, their families and the working class in general. The local community rallied around as best as it could. Yet *Pit Stop* confirms that, vote after vote, miners confirmed their determination to stand firm, even as increasing numbers were drifting back into work.

In the end they had no option but to succumb and go back to work, reluctantly accepting pennies off the pay and minutes on the day. For some activists, there was no going back as the employers refused to take them. David Organ, walked from Pillowell to Lydney to collect his unemployment benefit, passing his old place of work, Norchard Colliery. His former mine manager would greet him with “ow bist getting on then Dave?”. He would reply “Better than thee bist”. He was re-elected as President of the Forest of Dean Miners Association until his retirement in 1939 and helped Jack Williams, the Miners’ Agent, restore union membership and sort out minor disputes and lightning strikes.

*Pit Stop* ends its story as the local Miners’ Association became integrated into the South Wales Federation and later the National Union of Mineworkers.

*Pit Stop* is a valuable addition to the collection of history books on the Forest of Dean and the central part that mining and miners have played.

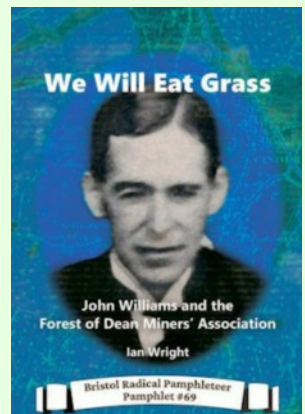
A copy of this book can be purchased at the Dean Heritage Centre, Forest Books and Crafts (Coleford), Hopewell Colliery Cafe or Speech House. Hardback copies are £19.95 and soft back is £14.95. It is also available via Amazon at: <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Pit-Stop-Dave-Organ/dp/1835631185>

Another new book about the recent social history of the Forest has just been published by member Ian Wright.

The November 2015 edition of this newsletter carried a short article by Ian Wright about John (Jack) Williams. In the article Ian asked for any information about John, who was a trade union agent representing the Forest of Dean Miners from 1922 to 1953.

In 1922, John Williams, who began working in a South Wales pit at age just thirteen, became the full-time trade union official for the Forest’s miners. Inspired by syndicalism, he believed that determined struggle could pave the way for a classless society free from exploitation.

Ian’s new book “We Will Eat Grass”, has just become available. It details the experiences of John Williams and the Forest of Dean Miners’ Association during the turbulent period of the 1920’s, including the 1926 general strike, and the nine-month miners’ lockout that followed.



You can find out more about the book, and how to purchase it at:  
<https://www.brh.org.uk/site/pamphleteer/we-will-eat-grass/>



# ‘Rails To The Forest’

*Book review by Chris Sullivan*

A sure-fire way of getting an overflowing audience at the Society’s indoor talks is to show pictures of industrial archaeology, preferably of railways. Such an audience will love this revised and expanded version of the 2010 *Rails To The Forest*, which covers the area from Berkeley through to Norchard. There is a 2013 companion volume, *Rails Through The Forest*, covering the rest of the old network.

What is this book? It’s 224 pages, mainly two-to-a-page photographs, monochrome and hence of good resolution. Each photograph has some lines of text of historical context, or pointing out fine image detail that my old eyes don’t spot in book format. There’s a four-page introduction, a short bibliography and an abbreviations list. Overall, there is a lot of information on offer. All the text is in a font I need good light to read. There’s a good map, but small.

Compared to the first edition, a still wider range of photographic sources has been obtained. Some photographs are aerial, most track side. The volunteers who have helped research and create the book are numerous, wide-ranging and diligent. They include a number of former railway employees, thus recording living heritage. That also explains the text’s pro-conservation and anti-British Railways stance around track lifting and site clearance. It also leads to phrases like ‘engine diagrammed’ or ‘running-in boards’, where I think the meaning is obvious.

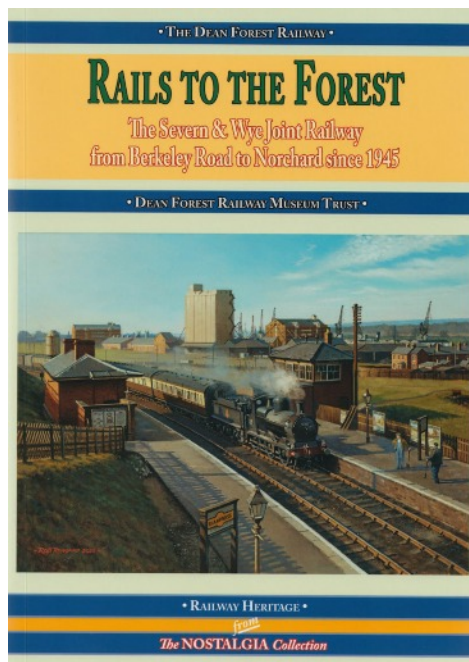
What isn’t the book about? The book isn’t a narrative of how the railways were used as a network, rather than an account of static locations. It doesn’t look at the economics or manpower of the railways, or their competitiveness. That would be a very different, and I suspect very difficult, project with a different audience. What one can do, though, is extract pieces from individual captions – the coming and quite rapid going of nuclear power in the area, for example.

Sharpness, its accident-waiting-to-happen bridge, Lydney’s docks and tinplate mill (for Golden Syrup cans), and Norchard, the home of the Dean Forest Railway, all get extended coverage. With railways once a key bit of infrastructure, there are plenty of snippets of social history, as well as industrial history, to be found.

Dean’s railways, from their horse-drawn days, were mainly about the export of a particular mineral. Their locations served that specific end. How tired, tatty and hand-me-down the railway assets were, when photographed, tells a story about the difficulty the Severn and Wye Joint Railway had in adapting to different purposes and different locations.

The book is available at indoor meetings of our Society. It is also available from the Dean Heritage Centre and other heritage sites, the Coleford bookshop amongst other locally, and of course at the Dean Forest Railway Shop. It is priced at £22.50. No, that isn’t expensive, nowadays – and cheaper than second-hand copies of the slimmer first edition.

*Rails To The Forest – The Severn and Wye Joint Railway from Berkeley Road to Norchard since 1945.* Dean Forest Railway Museum Trust, 2024.





# The Draw Of The Holly Wood by Cecile Hunt

During the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Forest of Dean was a popular area to visit for clubs and society's wishing to enjoy the 'Delicia Sylvarum'. The Malvern Naturalists' Field Club visited on Friday September 26<sup>th</sup>, 1884. A newspaper report said a select group from the club travelled by train from Malvern, and after some delays, via Hereford, reached Mitcheldean. Then *'...a long up and down ride.. ' to reach Speech House by 3:30pm and have dinner. Time had been lost so the paper 'on the history of the Forest, prepared for the occasion by Mr E Lees, was obliged to be taken as read,, ' . The paper covered much of the Forests history with mention of '., the grand Holly Wood near the Speech House.'*

One area intended to be visited by the naturalists, was the 'High Beeches' on the Coleford road near Speech House but due to time lost in travelling, and the need to catch the last train from Mitcheldean, the visit was cut short; as dinner finished *'... it was announced that the carriage was ready for departure..'* to catch the train. However, two of the *'fearless ladies with a gentleman attendant dashed for a few minutes into the grand Holly Wood, to take a hasty view of the exciting sylvan scenery...'* all then travelled back to Mitcheldean *'...among smoky furnaces and piles of horrid looking stony and cindery debris, passing the scattered houses of well named, unexciting Cinderford, until, with very few sylvan objects to compensate for the toils of their journey... reached Mitcheldean Station after sunset.'*

Friday 12<sup>th</sup> August 1898 saw members from The Royal Scottish Arboricultural Society visit the 'southern portions' of the Forest of Dean apparently the completion of *'...a most exhaustive inspection of the district'* and *'...one of the most enjoyable and instructive outings they have yet entertained themselves to...'*. They had stayed the previous night at the Speech House. At eight o'clock after breakfast they went, on foot, to examine portions of the King's Walk next to the Speech House. Holly trees abounded in great numbers in the woods surrounding Speech House. In 1885 it was estimated that there were over 3,000 holly trees stretching from Speech House Colliery, now Beechenhurst picnic site, to Foxes Bridge, Valley Road, Cinderford. Holly was managed by the crown for harvesting. In 1881 some of the hollies were guessed to be over 500 years old. The Arborists examined some of the King's Walks various trees including the holly trees which *'...abounded in this particular wood in great numbers, are said to have been planted in the time of Charles II and almost all seem to have reached the same stage of maturity.'* They appear to have not been planted in any particular order; some singly, some in groups. Average girth measurements were 3 to 3.5 feet. Some dominant trees, largest being 7 feet 11 inches, were possibly of an earlier period.

Travelling by coach they visited other woods around the Forest examining and measuring as they went finishing up at Blaize Bailey then back to Speech House. The following day a special train took them back to Scotland.

At Christmas, holly was sold by the Crown for income. Stealing was rife but incurred monetary fines and days of hard labour. Crown keepers spoke of the damage done by people cutting/stealing holly every Christmas season. How many holly trees, I wonder, are there now in the 'Holly Woods' around Speech House?



## Meetings in Review *with Owen McLaughlin, Keith Walker & Mary Sullivan*

On 15/02/2025 Sylvia Crocker talked about 'Encroachments in the New Forest in the 18<sup>th</sup> century'. The New Forest was established as a royal hunting reserve in 1079 by William I with laws protecting the forest and animals. These laws were strictly enforced by Verderers courts. Over the centuries, the importance of the forest as a royal hunting ground diminished and control became less stringent allowing people to settle within the forest boundaries without fear of reprisal. Settlers claimed 'squatters rights' whereby a settlement was believed to be legal if the squatters could build a basic dwelling consisting of four walls, a roof, a chimney, and a functioning hearth, within the space of a single day. Squatters' rights may have rested on dubious legal foundations but the reality was that squatting became widely tolerated and was difficult to prosecute.

By the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the agricultural revolution led to an increase in the number of squatters in the New Forest. They were blamed for illegally felling trees and for being a financial burden on local communities. The prominent cleric, William Gilpin, called the encroachers 'lawless and immoral'. However, other research does not support this view. Landowners wanted to evict squatters to extend enclosures and increase profits and many of the reported abuses were actually the work of local officials. Another local cleric who catalogued the local squatter population found that many of them were devout non-conformists with strong family connections and most were in steady employment.

There was a genuine fear of revolution in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century which encouraged repressive measures. In 1787 a Royal Commission on the New Forest recommended enclosing common land, culling all deer and destroying encroachments. In 1792 a bill was presented to Parliament to implement these recommendations but it was thrown out. In 1800, a survey found that most large encroachments were actually by landowners and keepers who were forced to buy what they had stolen. The squatters were reprieved as their holdings were deemed to be fairly insignificant. Despite considerable unrest, there were no disturbances on the scale of the Forest of Dean riots in 1831.

The talk raised many intriguing questions about the similarities and differences between the history of the New Forest and that of the Forest of Dean. Hopefully this interesting talk has created an appetite for some future comparative studies.

***O.M.***

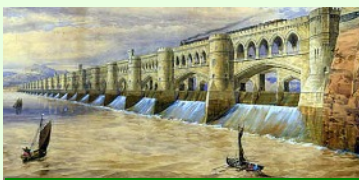
A very well attended meeting on Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> March saw Nigel Costley talking about 'The Search For Tidal Power from the Severn'. Nigel's extensive knowledge of the subject comes through his membership of the Severn Estuary Commission, a body set up by the Western Gateway pan regional partnership to look once again at the prospects of using the Severn Estuary as a source of tidal power.

A surprising 27 projects have previously proposed solutions for power generation from the estuary, beginning with James Fulljames' in 1849 for a proposed barrage between Beachley to Aust, with incorporated road and rail crossing (no electricity around then!). Apparently even the Nazi Government of Germany had plans for a Severn Barrage (1940) if their invasion plans had succeeded!

More recently amongst other projects, there have been the Severn Tidal Power Feasibility Study, the Swansea Bay Tidal Lagoon, and the West Somerset Tidal Lagoon. None of the proposals have come to fruition. There are immense issues associated with the implementation of such schemes, including the management of silt. The turbidity of the estuary is well known, with the Rivers Severn and Wye producing vast quantities of silt each year, adding to the silt locked in the estuary due to the extraordinary tides. The impact of a large barrage in the wrong location is another big issue, for example



*William I as stitched on the Bayeux Tapestry*



*Thomas Fulljames Severn Barrage*

the previously proposed Cardiff to Weston barrage would devastate the Port of Bristol. The potential ecological impact could also be huge, with possible unintended consequences affecting the wildlife of the estuary.

The forecast demand for electrical energy expected to more than double by 2050. Electricity from tidal power remains attractive due to the continuing need for energy security with the associated push to renewable sources. The costs of proposed projects were staggering, typically a lagoon might cost £2 billion, whereas a full barrage is estimated at £33 billion. For comparison, the Hinckley Point C Nuclear Power Station is forecast to cost £35 - £46 billion. Clearly the Commission has a difficult balancing act to perform in proposing a solution which meets all the requirements and protects the unique environment of the estuary.

There were many questions following Nigel's excellent talk, indicating the wide interest in this subject. The Commission has subsequently published its report which is available at:  
<https://www.severncommission.co.uk/final-recommendations/>

*K.W.*

On Saturday 19th April, Owen McLaughlin (right) gave a very well attended talk on Wynols Hill POW Camp. Owen explained that the camp covered a site of about 22 acres and was just ¾ mile outside the village of Coleford, which then had a population of less than 3,000. At its peak, the camp had more than 1,000 prisoners plus guards and admin staff. So, this was a huge influx of people into the area. In the early years of WWII there were few prisoners there living in tents. Before 1942 most prisoners were sent to USA or Canada. But in 1942 many Italian prisoners started arriving. They were put to work building the camp of prefabricated buildings. There were 40 Nissan huts; 21 for accommodation the others for administration, kitchens and washing facilities. The compound for the prisoners was about the size of 6 football pitches.



A Red Cross inspection in 1942 reported that the buildings were well-constructed and equipped, with good toilets and hot running water. The quality of food provided was excellent, as good as that provided for our armed forces, so better than that of some of the local population. Nevertheless, the attitude of the local Forest people was reported as more curiosity than hostility towards these POWs.

The next inspection in 1943 found over 800 prisoners housed at the camp. Most were put to work outside of the camp. 366 worked in agriculture, 342 in forestry. They worked a 48-hour week (7.30am to 5.30pm) and were paid 6d per day in "money" that could only be spent in the camp. Later in 1943 Italy surrendered. Subsequently those prisoners who became 'co-operators' (about 75%) were able to work outside the camp for better pay and conditions. There was plenty of interaction with local people. There were football matches between prisoners and locals. And although the authorities forbade fraternisation with local women, once restrictions were lifted there were many marriages between Italian men and local women.

However, it was different when German POWs were sent to the camp. They were kept separately from the Italians. And there was hostility between different groups of Germans. Those who had been caught early in the War and first sent to Canada or USA were mostly Nazis. The later troops were mostly conscripts. They were graded from A to D on their political sympathies. All but the most hardline were offered educational courses which taught about democracy and the British way of life.

The Italian camp had its own Italian leaders who worked well with the British officers. This is probably why some of the POWs were allowed to build the Marconi monument, designed by Bruno Porciani. They built the monument of recycled materials. It had a message of Peace, with a dove on top of a globe at each end but looked in style like fascist architecture.

The prisoners were retained up to 3 years after the war ended as labour was still needed. By 1948 all the prisoners had gone home. From 1948-1960s the buildings were used by seasonal workers for the Ribena factory. After that the site became derelict and was demolished to make way for housing in 1973.

After the tea break, Ian Gower gave a 20-minute talk about his experience of researching the history of his house in Mitcheldean and the people who had lived in it.

*M.S.*

## ‘Where Red Poppies Grow’ by *R.N.C. Godwin*

Along the 38th Parallel, in a distant land 5,500 miles away, there is a battlefield upon a mountain top: ‘Where Red Poppies Grow’, red with the blood of our brave ‘Glosters Boys’ for ever reminding us “By our deeds we are known”.

On 25th June 1950, North Korea invaded the South, crossing the 38th Parallel boundary line. The invading army, with the aid of the Chinese, were able to overwhelm the South Korean and American troops. The United Nations sent military aid, including 8 British Regiments of which our own 1st Battalion Gloucestershire Regiment were one.

United Nations troops scored a striking success against the North Korean Communist forces, driving them close to the Chinese border, precipitating the Chinese to come into the war.

In April 1951, the 1st Battalion of the Glosters, along with 170th Mortar Battery were positioned on hilltops guarding an ancient Korean route that led across the Imjin River and on to the capital Seoul. Side by side, at the ‘Imjin River Battle’, they took a last stand, defending their post ‘Hill 235’. They remained steadfast, repelling attack after attack of assaults and mortar fire. Both gallantly fulfilled their battle order to “Hold on where you are”. A delayed withdrawal order permitting the Glosters to break-out was to arrive too late at night. As the day dawned, a heavy mist shrouded the Imjin River valley below, 700 Glosters found themselves surrounded and overwhelmingly outnumbered by 10,000 Chinese combatants from the North.

For three days, our valiant Glosters, without food or water, fiercely fought every yard of the battleground. The fighting was furious, bloody, and relentless, yet still fearlessly they held their ground, until their ammunition ran out, and not until the last gallant soldier was overpowered by the surge of the opposing cohort. 522 Glosters were taken prisoner by the Chinese and suffered for over two years the most brutal captivity as Prisoners of War. Confined to small bamboo cages, they were burned with cigarettes butts and urinated on. Some were tortured, degraded, and held in solitary confinement.

Alas, the 29th Independent Brigade lost a total of 1,091 men; 622 Glosters would never return home. Still, 16 fortunate Foresters passed through the ‘Freedom Archway’, ending their captivity woes, at last to see their Forest of Dean home.

The South Korean people have never forgotten the debt of gratitude they owe to the men who fought for their freedom by saving their capital, Seoul. In their honour, Hill 235, is known as ‘Glosters Hill’, and a magnificent memorial graces the valley below. In recognition of their bravery, the Glosters along with 170th Mortar Battery received a US Presidential Citation in 1951. The Citation acknowledged the Glorious

Glosters’ heroic efforts in “demonstrating superb battlefield courage and discipline, setting them apart and above other units participating in the same battle”.

An ‘Imjin Veterans Memorial’ is now planned for the Forest of Dean, to be sited in the Cyril Hart Arboretum. When the memorial is unveiled, the people of the Forest of Dean will be able to commemorate and honour the bravery of the 16 Forester ‘Glorious Glosters’ who did return home.

For more details about the memorial, and how to contribute towards the fund raising, go to the Forest of Dean District Council website ([fdean.gov.uk](http://fdean.gov.uk)) and search for ‘Imjin Memorial’.



*The Imjin Memorial, planned for the Cyril Hart Arboretum*