

FOREST OF DEAN LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

news

November 2022



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- Roger Deeks on 'The Decline of Christian Worship in the Dean'

News

November 2022

Editor:

Keith Walker
51 Lancaster Drive
Lydney
GL15 5SJ
01594 843310

NewsletterEditor@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk

Chair:

John Lane
07890260416

Chair@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk

Treasurer:

Chris Sullivan
01594 860197

Treasurer@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk

Secretary:

Secretary@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk

Website:

forestofdeanhistory.org.uk

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Editors Notes

It seems like a while ago now as I write these notes, but I guess for most of us the death of Queen Elizabeth II was a really significant historical point in our lives. It was one of those occasions that national and local history really do intertwine. The front cover serves to illustrate the point, as the photograph shows Lydney Town Council at the preaching cross in the town, with the Mayor, Tasha Saunders, about to read the proclamation announcing Charles II as the new king.

One of our members, Roger Deeks, was fortunate to be able to attend the funeral service of the Queen in his role as Vice Lord-Lieutenant of the Gloucestershire Lieutenancy. Roger is a very busy man, working on many Forest based heritage projects associated with history, literature and music. I was delighted therefore that he found time to write the feature article ('The Decline of Christian Worship in the Dean') which is in the centre pages of this edition. Roger has also provided an insightful and masterful review of Polly Morland's book, 'A Fortunate Woman' for the back cover. I endorse Rogers comments about the book, which is a very enjoyable read. Some of you may even recognise the local doctor about whom the book is written!

As is traditional now, you will find a four page insert in the middle of this newsletter which outlines the calendar of events for 2023, and also provides a synopsis of each event as appropriate. There are also a pull-out order form for the new edition (37) of the New Regard, and a further form giving you the opportunity to purchase older issues of the New Regard at a special members price.

If you would like to write a short article to feature in the middle pages of a future edition of the newsletter, please do get in touch. My contact details are shown above.

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



It is difficult to believe that a complete year has passed since I became Chairman but here we are, October 2022 and I am beginning my second year in post!

12 months ago we were coming out of the effects of Covid, or at least, so we thought, it still seems to be present and becoming more prevalent as the year draws to a conclusion.

Despite this, our monthly meetings have resumed at Bream Community Centre but we have arranged a couple of Zoom meetings, which remain the preferred option of at least one or two of our members. A combined Zoom and face to face meeting would be a good thing but I think that may just be beyond our reach at the moment. However, if we can find a way of delivering both simultaneously, at a sensible cost, then we will look at the viability of doing so.

Nicola Wynn has reached the end of her tenure as our Secretary and I would like to take this opportunity of once again, thanking her for her contribution to the running of the History Society, it has been much appreciated.

Fortuitously, another member has stepped up and expressed an interest in taking on the role, hopefully, by the time you read this, we will have a new Secretary co-opted prior to being formally appointed at the next Committee Meeting.

Cecile Hunt has done a sterling job in putting together our Meetings Programme with a wide variety of speakers. Full details are included on the Meetings Programme. In addition, we are working on more summer days out to places of interest.

On which subject, I have previously indicated that I wanted to make contact with other History Societies with a view to arranging reciprocal visits. I am pleased to report that I have made contact with The Chepstow Society who are keen to (re) establish links with our Society to our mutual benefit and interest. I hope to have more news on this in the New Year.

I have always been interested in words and their use, in particular the origins and development of our language and how it has been formed from many different sources. Holidaying in Wales, I am constantly reminded of the close connection between the Welsh and French languages: The word 'bridge' is 'Pont' in both languages; School is 'Ysgol' in Welsh and Ecole in French and there are many other examples. I am often critical of American English and how it has bastardised the English language but, in truth, we have been doing exactly the same thing for centuries!

Perhaps a good local example of this is the old Forest habit of ending most sentences with the word "*mind*" – whose origins are Saxon. The use of that word is not unique to the Forest however, my grandfather, who was born and brought up on the Cotswolds, would often end his sentences with "*mind thee*".

I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at our meetings – the attendance at recent, post Covid meetings, has started to rise, long may that continue!

John Lane

MEMBERSHIP



We are now into membership year 2022/23. Thank you to all those who have already renewed their subscriptions to the Society. Membership cards for those who have renewed accompany this newsletter, and for others a renewal form is included. Please pay by BACS if you can, and then email me a membership renewal form as well, even if your details have not changed.

If you believe you have renewed but have not received a card, please email me at membership@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk or call 01594 543042 so I can amend my records and send you a card. This year we have asked for a contact telephone number. This is only so that if you are booked onto an event of which details have had to be changed at the last minute, we are able to contact you quickly.

As well as renewals I am pleased to welcome the following new members to our Society: Ian Pettitt, Lawrence Fielder, Teresa and Martin Davies, Kevin Armitage, Isabella Nash, and Malcolm Hackman. We hope you enjoy your membership and look forward to seeing you at forthcoming meetings and events.

Ian Gower (membership@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk)



If you are looking for a little entertainment & diversion, why not try the British Association for Local History 'Ten Minute Talks'. You can find these online at: <https://www.balh.org.uk/ten-minute-talks>

A wide range of subjects are covered including subjects such as: 'The Royal British Legion - Telling Our Story', & 'Researching the Spanish Flu Epidemic 1918-1919'

There are also a number of podcasts available on the BALH website at:

<https://www.balh.org.uk/podcast>

Subjects covered include: 'Why Is Local History Important', 'Community Archives & Local History', 'How To Get Started in Local History'.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Saturday 12th November - 3pm
West Dean Centre, Bream, GL15 6JW
Cecile Hunt - "The Berkeley Affair"

Saturday 10th December - 3pm
West Dean Centre, Bream, GL15 6JW
Patrick Furley - Magic Lantern Christmas Show



On Saturday 8th October, Chair John Lane welcomed members to the Annual General Meeting; *“The past year has seen us reverting to face-to-face meetings as well as a couple of Zoom meetings. The breadth and quality of the Talks has been outstanding. Next year’s programme has already been arranged and will be published shortly, thanks go to Cecile Hunt for her hard work in putting together an interesting and varied programme of talks. Returning to the subject of Zoom meetings,*

there has been a mixed reaction to them from the membership, but we hope to be able to continue providing both options, although, sadly, not at the same time, the technology to allow that is beyond our grasp at the moment.

When I took over the role of Chairman from Mary, I said that I hoped to be able to continue her good work by creating links with other history groups and I’m pleased that we have had a reciprocal visit from members of Leckhampton History Group and we have visited Risca History Society. It is my intention that these visits should continue and to that end I am actively looking at arranging further visits, more on that, hopefully, later in the year.

I would also like to put on record my thanks to all members of the Committee for their contribution to keeping the Society going. Nicola Wynn will be stepping down as our Secretary after her three year tenure and again, my thanks to her for all her secretarial skills throughout the year.

Our New Regard publication continues to produce high quality, well researched articles covering a plethora of subjects all rooted in the Forest, of note was Edition No 36, a Lydney Special, which has been extremely well received. While talking of publications, many thanks to Mary Sullivan for ensuring various outlets around the Forest have a supply of New Regard and the Story of The Forest to sell – thanks too to Sue Middleton for all her hard work in coordinating the Foresters Forest Project and keeping the Society involved

The Quarterly Newsletter also continues to provide interesting and relevant articles – we are always looking for more content, if anyone feels they would like to contribute an article, please speak to one of the committee members. My thanks to Keith Walker for continuing to produce such a fine publication.

I mentioned earlier the Committee and want to repeat sincere thanks for all their hard work, often unseen. I would also like to extend a plea to all members of the Society, your presence on the Committee would be extremely welcome in whatever capacity, please have a chat with any current member of the Committee if you are interested.”

The winner of the Cyril Hart Prize of £50 plus certificate, for the best written and researched article in the New Regard, Vol 36, was awarded to Chris Sullivan for his piece entitled ‘Charles Bathurst saves Lydney Dog and finds God’. The Scott Garrett Prize of £50 and certificate for the best presentation at meetings was also awarded to Chris Sullivan for his talk on ‘The Uncovering of Lydney Park Roman Temple’. Congratulations to Chris on his double award!

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

Chair: John Lane	Vice Chair: Sue Middleton	Secretary: *Pending*
Treasurer: Chris Sullivan	Membership: Ian Gower	Conservation: Simon Moore
Indoor Meetings: Cecile Hunt	Publications + GLHA	Publicity: Sue Newton
Enquiries: Averil Kear	Representative: Mary Sullivan	Newsletter Editor: Keith Walker
Member: Nicola Wynn		

The Treasurer, Chris Sullivan, presented the Annual Accounts for 2021-2022. Since the last AGM the Publications Account has been closed and the funds merged with the General Account. Therefore total income for the year ending 31st July 2022 was £19014.79, whilst total expenditure was £16136.54, leaving net receipts for the year at £2878.25. Regarding Publications Activity, sales of all publications (both direct and via the eshop) produced £8848.30 income. Expenditure in sales of publications was £2669.19, leaving net receipts for the year at £6179.11. The monetary assets of the Society at 31st July were declared to be; General Account, £8648.61; Deposit Account, £20892.34, giving total liquidity of £29540.95.

The Decline of Christian Worship in the Dean

by Roger Deeks

When historians look back over the second Elizabethan age, one of the most striking features will be the decline of Christian worship. In recent years this has accelerated so that the Anglican, Catholic and Methodist congregations in the Forest of Dean have reached critical levels. As a result, many of the Churches and Chapels across the breadth of the Forest of Dean are unsustainable and have closed or are threatened with closure. The last decade has seen the closure of some significant places of worship: Ellwood Methodist Church (formerly 'Providence Chapel') closed in 2016, Lydney Baptist Church in 2017, Springfield Chapel (Lydney Ebenezer Primitive Methodist Chapel) in 2018.

Further afield, in 2018 Tibberton Methodist Chapel closed after 179 years, as did Sacred Heart Church in Sedbury after only 31 years because of the struggle to provide clergy to cover all the Mass centres in the Forest. St Margaret Mary Roman Catholic Church at High Nash in Coleford became a place of worship for the congregation of St John's Church when it was officially closed for regular worship on 30th September 2016. Elsewhere in 2018, Cinderford's Bilson Mission 'tin tabernacle' held its last service.

More recently, 'rising costs, an ageing membership and decreasing revenue' at the Cinderford (Wesley) Methodist Church, Belle Vue Road was responsible for the closure of the Grade II-listed place of worship in 2020. In the 1980's there were four places of Methodist worship in Cinderford. Cinderford Wesley and Cinderford Bridge were ex-Wesleyan, Ruspidge was originally Bible Christian, and Church Road was ex-Primitive. In Cinderford, the heart of the association between Forest colliers and nonconformism, all four are now closed. Woolaston Methodist Church, a Primitive Methodist Chapel built at Netherend in 1867, closed in 2020. In 1967 the Church celebrated its centenary, and a pamphlet was published in celebration, compiled by E.M. Hicks.

Methodist Superintendent for Gloucestershire, Rev Dr James Tebbutt, said: "It is always sad to see a church building close and this decision has not been taken lightly, but sometimes God perhaps calls us to let go of places that have worked in the past for new possibilities to happen in the present."

The closure of chapels and churches nevertheless generates profound feelings of loss to worshippers and the wider community. The disposal of chapels often requires protection of public access to graves and memorials. Some chapels and churches are Grade II listed buildings, but this does not always protect internal fittings. The fixed organ in Lydney Baptist Chapel on which Herbert Howells learned to play could be lost if it stands in the way of viable development.



Salem Free Church, Berry Hill

The Decline of Christian Worship in the Dean



Salem Free Church interior

The latest church to close is Salem Free Church at Berry Hill. The congregation dwindled post Covid, and as is often the case, the difficult decision to close was the responsibility of a small group of loyal worshippers who could not afford to go on. Berry Hill Salem Church has enormous significance in the life of Dennis Potter, a strict attender of the local chapel, as he remarked: ‘Up the hill . . . usually on a Sunday, sometimes three times to Salem Chapel . . .’

The church was a late addition to the churches and chapels in the Forest and said to have been built in 1900 by ‘miners who broke away from the other chapel in the village because they wanted to talk to God in their own way’. Potter’s was one of a small group of families involved in the founding. The small church is very well proportioned, and one visitor described the special aura of the church as caused by: ‘partly the unchanged simplicity of the decor - as if I had just walked into a working man’s front parlour in the early years of the century. But, most of all, it was a mood, a feeling in the air, a haunting blend of honest toil and simple prayers.’

Potter had an ambiguous relationship with the chapel. It was part of the social world that informed and shaped him, but in ‘A Beast with Two Backs’ he drew a picture of the hypocrisy he perceived in the preaching he had experienced. The Salem Church hosted another Potter favourite, Berry Hill Silver Band which has their band room behind the chapel. They look to be secure with a long lease that will be inherited by the future owners. It remains to be seen if a resident band will increase the development potential of the old church. Thanks to Nicola Wynn of Dean Heritage Centre, and Berry Hill Memorial Hall, many of the artefacts and memorials from the church have been saved for future generations.

The more substantial disused chapels and churches usually remain features of the landscape as they are put to other uses, often residential. The redundant tin tabernacles such as at Edge End and Bilson Mission have few alternative uses and are less sustainable, leaving demolition as a likely option. What is crucial for all these buildings is to preserve their history and the experiences and memories attached to them. They shaped generations of Forest families and were much more influential over their lives than the collieries that were just the preserve of men. Here women, men and children were baptised, educated, married, mourned and were often buried.

The Tin Tabernacle at the Edge of Town is a *Voices from the Forest*, University of Gloucestershire, Historic England and Cinderford Town Council sponsored project to research the history of Bilson Mission using archival and oral history sources.

<https://www.voicesfromtheforest.co.uk/bilsonmission.html>.



Salem Free Church organ

Why No Churches - Part 2 *by Cecile Hunt*

The Forest of Dean being extra-parochial land meant that it was outside of the jurisdiction of any parish; see previous article.

Newland Church was regarded as the Foresters' parish church. In the early 16th century one of its chantry priests was required to preach the gospel twice a week at forges and mines within the parish. By the late 18th century Foresters and inhabitants attended several churches near the extra-parochial area. Bibles were sold in Coleford, cheaply, from 1815.

An 1842 an Act (Cap. 65 5 & 6 Vict)* was passed *...to divide the Forest of Dean in the County of Gloucester into Ecclesiastical Districts*. The Act detailed how funds comprising of voluntarily contributions, Parliamentary Grant, Pyncombe Charity donations and money given by the Governors of the Bounty of Queen Anne were being made available for the building of churches and chapels, and maintenance of the 'Poor Clergy', in the Forest of Dean's previously extra-parochial areas. Money made available was also to be invested as laid out in the Act.

Three chapels appear to have already been built, with assistance from the Crown, by the time the act was passed; these were: Christchurch Chapel (1816), Chapel of the Holy Trinity (Drybrook -1817) & Chapel of Saint Paul's (Parkend -1822). The Act stipulated that a chapel was to be built *'...at or near' Cinderford with the '...consent of the Bishop of Gloucester and Bristol within whose Diocese the said Forest is, and of any two of the Commissioners of Her Majesty's Woods, Forest, Land Revenues, Works and Buildings...*

The new Ecclesiastical districts were to be called Ecclesiastical Districts of: Christchurch; Holy Trinity and Saint Paul. The Chapel, when built at Cinderford, was to be known as the Ecclesiastical District of Saint John (built 1844). If this Chapel was not built within the stipulated two years of passing the Act, Commissioners were required to locate a new Ecclesiastical District within next two years so the Chapel could be built.

The Chapels were to have perpetual curacies and incumbents to have perpetual successions and empowered to receive Endowments in land or tithes. All chapels would be subject to the jurisdictions of the Bishop of Gloucester and Bristol and the Archdeacon of Gloucester and be within the Forest Deanery. The Act allowed marriages, baptisms, burials etc to be solemnised in the Chapels.

Stipulated in the Act was that from time to time the Commissioners of Woods were, if funds allowed, to purchase in the *'Names of the Governors of the Bounty of Queen Anne...'* three per cent stocks *'...sufficient when purchased to produce the annual Dividend of £31.9s.6d... such Stock shall for ever form part of the Endowment of the said Chapel of Christchurch...'* Further stock purchases on the same lines were to produce annual dividends of £58.7s.0d for Holy Trinity Chapel, and for the Chapel of Saint Paul stock purchases were to produce £75.6s.6d per annum.

The Commissioners of Woods were given authority to make grants for increasing sites of existing burial grounds, and of the intended (Cinderford) chapel and burial ground and parsonage house etc. The Patronage of Christchurch & Holy Trinity was vested in Her Majesty (Victoria) and Saint Pauls was vested in the Lord Bishop of Gloucester and Bristol.

In the later 19th century, more churches and school-chapels were built, these included churches at Viney Hill (1863 – built as a memorial to Charles Bathurst) and Lydbrook (1850). In lesser hamlets before the First World War missions were opened.

* 1842 Act (Cap. 65 5 & 6 Vict) can be accessed via Google.



Christchurch



DEAN
HERITAGE CENTRE

DHC News Update *with Nicola Wynn*

Winter Opening hours

November & December opening hours: 10-4 Thursday to Sunday

Collections care

Thanks to a Collections Care grant from AIM (Association of Independent Museums) we are continuing to undertake work to improve collection care standards. Earlier in the year a professional conservator carried out a review of our collection and gave recommendations for improvements and over the summer we had new UV film fitted to gallery windows which will prevent damage to objects from UV light. It is great to have AIM support to enable us to achieve best practice standards.

Gall 4 exhibition running until 31st December

Free Mines & Coal Faces photography exhibition by Nick Hodgson. The exhibition has two distinct sections: The first section has colour photographs recording the evidence of mining of both current and old freemines, examining mankind's trace and the regenerative power of nature. The second section, taken in black and white, focuses on members of today's freemining community, and their work, culture and personalities. Nick's high quality book accompanies the exhibition and can be bought in the DHC shop.

Christmas family activities

December 3rd & 4th and December 10& 11th children's activities: Come along to our special Christmas Elf workshops in the craft hut and make something special for Christmas. Bookings are now being taken to visit Father Christmas in our Forester's cottage. Father Christmas will be in residence from Saturday 17th December to Friday 23rd December between 10.30 am and 3pm. Please ring to book.

See our website for further details: www.deanheritagecentre.com

All enquiries tel 01594 822170

SNIPPET - From Gloucestershire Chronicle 29th May 1841

"The following are particulars of a melancholy accident which occurred on Sunday week at the colliery of Mrs Whitehouse, near the Five Acres, in the Forest of Dean, by the bursting of a steam boiler, by which a mason named John Frowen was nearly killed. It appears that he was employed in building a stack on top of the boiler when, by Frowen's putting a brick on it, the safety valve became closed, and the steam having no vent, blew up the boiler with terrific violence, destroying the engine and engine house, and throwing the poor fellow a distance of forty yards. Two pieces of the boiler, each weighing seven hundred weight, were blown eighty yards, and many bricks 150 yards from the spot. We trust poor Frowen will eventually recover, though it is feared he has entirely lost his sight. A man who was in another pit, half mile off, on hearing the explosion, looked in the direction of the Five-Acre Pit, and saw something in the air as if flying. On running to the spot he discovered it to be John Frowen, who had fallen on a young oak tree, otherwise he might be dashed to pieces."



Meetings in Review *with Chris & Mary Sullivan & Sue Middleton*

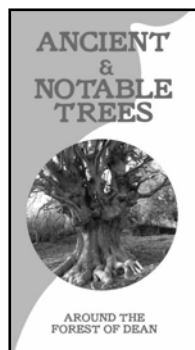
The original guided walk around the Ancient and Notable Trees of Steam Mills was postponed from Sat 18th June to Sat 30th July, due to Paul Rutter being ill. Fortunately, he was in fine form as he led us on a circular walk, taking in some of the Forest, different habitats and management areas and some truly magnificent trees.

One of these was an amazing Beech tree which was hundreds of years old and wore its various battle scars proudly. Paul explained that a single tree can support an amazing range of other species, from birds and bats to insects and lichen and the rotting wood from fallen branches can provide a rich habitat.

There were various examples along the walk of how trees adapt to their surroundings, such as the oak tree with all its branches growing on one side, towards the light, due to the dense conifer plantation on its other side which impeded growth in that direction. Sometimes lower branches might use the ground to help stabilise the tree, if it were in windy conditions.

Some trees can be identified as potential veteran trees of the future and Paul had conducted a few sessions with volunteers to 'halo' these trees in the past. This means that the surrounding vegetation and smaller trees are cleared in the immediate vicinity of the potential veteran so it doesn't have to compete with other species and hopefully continues to grow to become a grand old tree in the future.

Paul was the project leader of the Foresters' Forest 'Ancient and Notable Tree' project which meant that he and a team of volunteers have surveyed the Ancient trees in the Forest and recorded their details. This data has gone to both the Gloucestershire Centre for Environment Records and Forestry England so that the data resides there, and future surveys can be updated to monitor these trees over time. One of the end results of the project was the 'Ancient and Notable Tree' leaflet which can be obtained from Forestry England at Bank House in Coleford or from Sue Middleton. It provides details of 36 outstanding trees to visit in Our Forest, providing photos, grid references and a map. **S.M.**



3rd September brought us back to the idea of autumn and autumn meetings, and Alan Pilbeam was the speaker to launch our new season. Alan had been a Deputy Headmaster at Thomas Rich's School in Gloucester. Talking fluently without notes, he opened with reminiscences of taking school parties to various parts of the Dean.

Alan then turned to John Bellows, and his book on early vacationing in the Dean. Bellows was born in 1831 and brought up in Camborne. From his father, he gained an interest in languages and nature. Apprenticed to a printer, he took jobs with London and Gloucester printing firms, opening his own firm in Gloucester at the age of 27. This prospered, and moved to successively larger Gloucester premises. His firm lasted long after his death in 1902, eventually closing in 1967.

He was a keen traveller, often in the cause of the Quaker faith, and saw a niche for portable dictionaries. He acquired a network of language experts as well as poets, antiquarians and US Senators. Harvard

University gave him a Master's degree. With the help of Napoleon's nephew, he published the first of several little dictionaries, an English-French one, which sold well.

Tourism had largely passed the Forest by. Gilpin's tour of the Picturesque was on the Wye from Ross through Monmouth. The opening of the Sharpness bridge and passenger train services into the Forest, rather than round its edges, made the Forest more accessible. Bellows took the opportunity of converting his own experience into a guide for intending tourists, a book he authored, printed and sold, 'A Week's Holiday in the Forest of



Dean'. He included train times, information about costs of local horse transport and other services. For example, informing the Lydney Stationmaster would ensure transport, and lunch laid ready at the Speech House. He also covered Gilpinesque viewpoints, already-vanishing ferns, and the giant Foxgloves of Staunton.

The book was first published in 1880. Our New Regard team have revived this in replica, with copies for sale at the meeting, and on Amazon.

Alan showed us a number of Bellows' little colour illustrations, (see previous page), carefully chosen by Bellows to dispel any notion that the Dean was marred by industry and unfriendly locals. Alan's well-received talk ended with a range of questions from the audience. **C.S.**

Liz Griffiths was the speaker after the Annual General Meeting on Saturday 8th October. She offered a presentation about Llanthony Secunda Priory in Gloucester. She used a range of archive illustrations, maps and archaeological reconstructions to make her points.

The first Llanthony Priory was established in 1118 in the Vale of Eywas in Wales. Manned by Augustinian canons, it attracted wealth from Norman nobles, including extensive lands in Ireland. During the Anarchy, this isolated Norman settlement became hazardous, with the majority of canons seeking a safer future outside the town walls of Gloucester. This second establishment, Llanthony Secunda, was a daughter 'cell' of the first Llanthony. Its church was dedicated in 1137. The second priory was supported by Miles of Gloucester. He had ambitions for his new priory, and more wealth moved from Prima to Secunda. Even when order was restored in Wales, most canons refused to move back to the Welsh mountains. By 1205, a settlement of partition was reached.

Although Secunda had the best of the income generation – Gloucester was important enough to hold the 1216 Coronation – fire was a major setback. The Black Death badly damaged rent collection. There were constant disputes with the town and its Cathedral over income from burial and education monopolies. Nevertheless, in 1200 it was 'a noble house...in a place so beautiful and peaceful, pleasantly planted with fruitful vineyards, parks and orchards'.

The two Priors were reunified in 1481 under Henry Dene, but the Dissolution of the Monasteries started in 1536. Perhaps seeing the inevitable, the Prior at the time sent his Steward to Cromwell to agree a dissolution in exchange for pensions for the canons. Steward Porter then bought Secunda. Part of it became a new parish church and the rest a family home.

After destruction in the Civil War, the site was largely stripped by the Scudamores and used by tenant farmers. The Gloucester and Sharpness Canal and then railway developments destroyed much of the underground remains, including burials. Under successive railway ownerships, the site degenerated into industrial and scrap metal storage. Gloucester City Council bought the site in 1974.

The Llanthony Secunda Priory Trust took over the site, now only 5 acres, in 2007. Its fundraising took three buildings off the 'At Risk' register. Its second bid for HLF funding allowed restoration for modern use, including weddings, of the mediaeval range and the Victorian farmhouse, visible from the road, and the brick range of stables. The grounds are available to members of the public to enjoy.



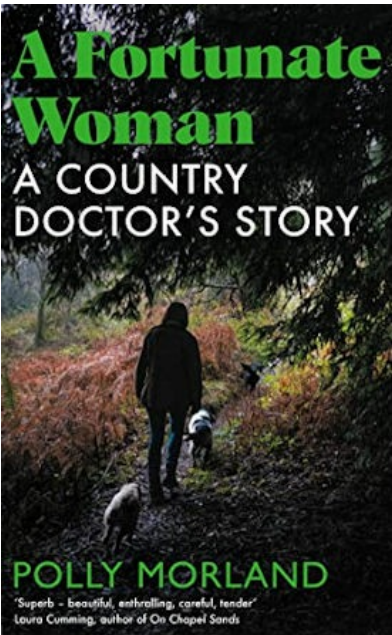
*Llanthony Secunda Priory after restoration.
Photo by Tom Axford (CC BY-SA 4.0)*

Book Review by Roger Deeks

Polly Morland's recently published book, *A Fortunate Woman: A Country Doctor's Story* is a worthy successor to *A Fortunate Man: The Story of a Country Doctor*, published in 1967. It is set in the same landscape as John Berger and Jan Mohr's landmark publication of Berger's observations of a country GP.

For a generation and many since, *A Fortunate Man* was a bible, an exquisitely illustrated description of how we would like our doctor to be and where we would all like to live. There was some irony when the 'Fortunate Man', the GP described as Dr 'Sassall' in the book, took his own life after a long struggle with bi-polar illness. After the book was published, St Briavels, the village at the heart of the book had to suffer the notoriety of a News of the World exposé. Patients who told their personal stories in the consulting room, without having given informed or written consent, had to live with their lives being shared with the world. The narrative has since been seen as false, sexist, and patronising in today's terms on several levels, not least for excluding the contribution of the GP's wife, the performance of the GP criticised by some including Polly Toynbee, and the description of locals as peasants. Yet the GP concerned remains venerated by most of his patients fifty years later, suggesting that Berger did see someone quite exceptional, although not perfect, at work.

The strength of Berger's story is that it is beautifully told and photographically illustrated, which can also be said of Moreland's narrative. The inspiration for the book came when clearing her mother's home and coming across the book, she recognised one of the photographs. It showed the rural valley where she now lived. 'Not only was this my home, my valley' she writes, 'but I too knew the doctor, his successor, the woman who serves this community today'. The book then became a mirror of Berger's book, only now with two women, one reflecting on the practice of the other. In Moreland's book her practitioner is facing new challenges of having many older patients, with conditions such as dementia and the problem as to who cares for them. Gender dysmorphia and coercive control are phenomenon that are only now recognised, introducing a new lexicon that Dr Sassall would not have understood. Usefully for social historians in the future, the Covid epidemic arrives halfway through the book and the remote, telephone and video led doctor-patient interface that we are all now familiar with begins in earnest.



This doctor-patient relationship at the heart of Berger's book and the humanism and compassion in that relationship, was the inspiration for Moreland's GP to take up general practice. It is a struggle to deliver that model of care in an era of increasingly demanding, highly contractual, formula led treatment, that pushes general practitioners to be technicians and the relationship with patients to be transactional. What we all yearn for of course, is the personalised, humanistic care that comes from a GP who knows you, your family, and your circumstance. That Dr Sassall's patients, over fifty years later still have a doctor driven by those ideals gives us some hope. Moreland's book is a good read and testament to her observational and journalistic abilities. It compliments two other books that give a 'then and now' insight into general practice in the Forest: Bill Tandy's *A Doctor in the Forest* and *Another Doctor in the Forest* by Chris Nancollas. These are two excellent memoirs by two much loved GPs from different generations, who give the practitioner's perspective.

A Fortunate Woman: A Country Doctor's Story by Polly Morland, with photographs by Richard Baker, is published by Picador, price £16.99.

256 pages ISBN 9781529071139