

BOOK REVIEW



Exploring Historic Dean



Fourteen scenic walks in and around an ancient forest
John Sheraton and Rod Goodman



Exploring Historic Dean

By John Sheraton & Rod Goodman

John Sheraton, who had a great hand in the production of the Society's "Mines Trails" and "Bicslade Tramroad Trail" leaflets, as well as the "Roll of Honour" CD, has now turned his talent to the Ramblers.

Together with colleague Rod Goodman, he has produced a book containing fourteen walks, entitled "Exploring Historic Dean".

This is far from just another book of walks. It starts off with "A Brief History of the Dean", with the sub titles of Geology, Pre History, History, Industry & Transport and Natural History.

Each of the fourteen walks consists of two sections, one is the instructions for the walk itself, complete with a detailed map. The other, rather longer, section gives information on points of wide ranging interest to be found along the way, or even nearby.

John's prowess as a photographer shows up with the many photographs, which illustrate the book, along with older sketches.

This fascinating book is published for the Forest of Dean Ramblers by Fineleaf Editions and is available from various outlets, including the Forest Bookshop, the Chepstow Bookshop, Dean Heritage and Dean Forest Railway shop at Norchard, at the cost of £9.95

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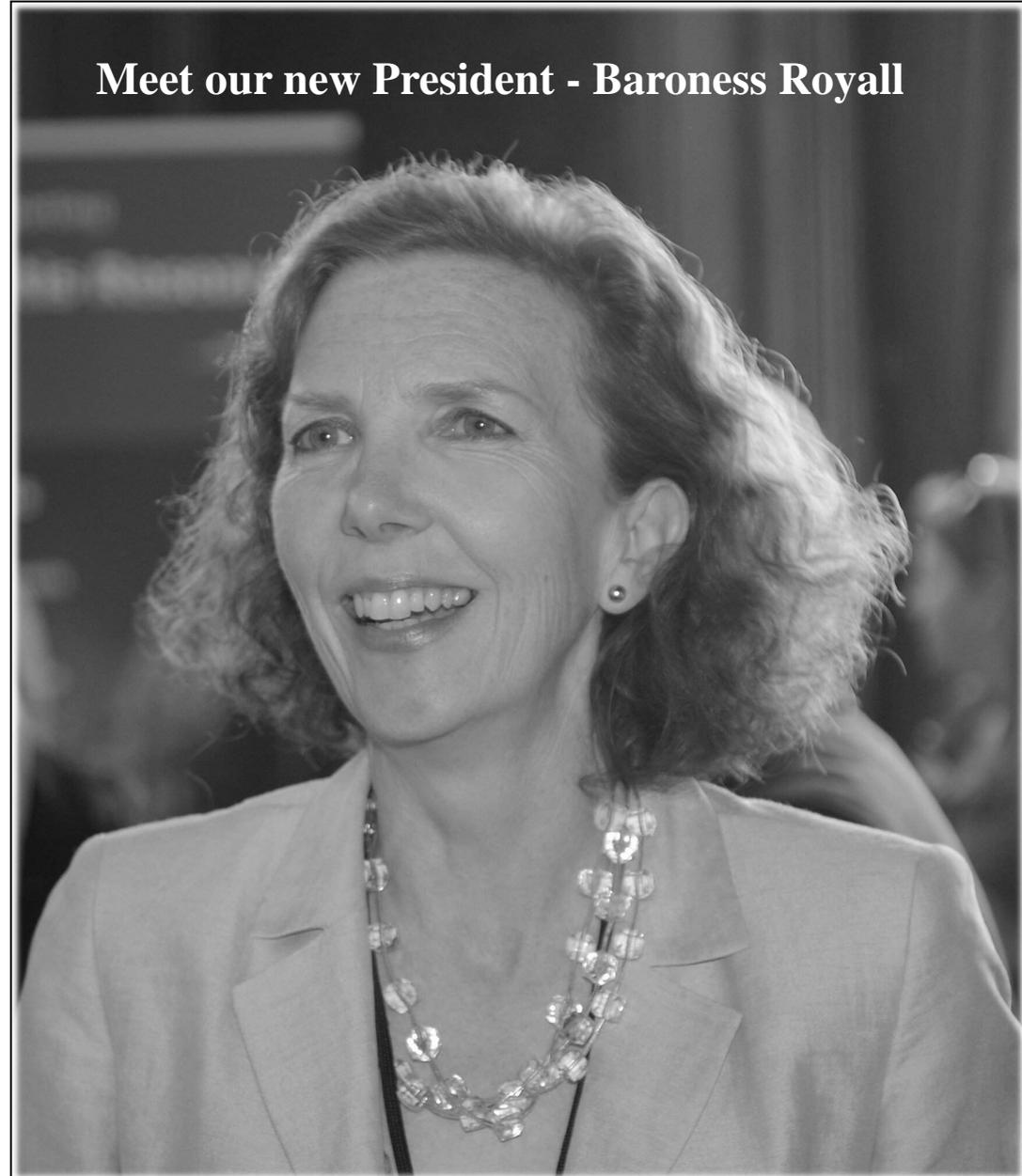
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the Forest of Dean
Local History Society
news

January 2010



Meet our new President - Baroness Royall



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Editors Notes

Enclosed with this mailing is the membership card (paid up members only) containing the programme for the next year.

It will be noticed that it is rather more crowded than usual. As reported in the last newsletter, it has been decided to hold regular functions throughout the summer, as we feel that we get rather out of touch during the long recess between April and October.

Most of these will be in the form of outings or walks, and although we have listed an outline of our proposed functions, more details regarding transport, etc. will be notified with a later newsletter and on the website.

As well as our summer outings and walks, we are holding our 5th History Fair at Bell's Club on May 23rd, a new venue for us, and organisers Averil and Cecile have promised a "new look" Fair as well.

The exhibition to celebrate the 25th edition of our journal, the New Regard will be held at the Dean Heritage Museum throughout April, May and June so it looks like being a busy year.

Despite the sudden and unexpected illness of John Precious, our new project on a modern history of the Forest is slowly taking shape. John regrets that he will be unable to continue as co-ordinator, but continues to take an interest in his 'brainchild'. The rest of us are battling on, and our thanks to those who have already contributed, but more contributions, either written or oral will always be welcome. We wish John a speedy recovery.

Christine Martyn



Introducing Our New President

Jan Royall was born in Gloucester, growing up in Blaisdon, in the Forest of Dean, where she attended the Royal Forest of Dean Grammar School. She went on to study Spanish and French at Westminster College, London. She became Special Adviser to Neil Kinnock, who was then leader of the Labour Party in 1980.

In 2004 she was elevated to the peerage as Baroness Royall of Blaisdon and became a Government Whip in the House of Lords and a member of the Cabinet. She was made Leader of the House of Lords in 2008 and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster in 2009.



Recently she has taken great interest in the proposed development of the Northern United Colliery site and was actively concerned with the successful campaign to save the Forest hospitals.

Baroness Jan Royall of Blaisdon was nominated as President of the Society by the committee, which nomination was approved at the AGM. In her letter of acceptance to Ron Beard she has expressed her intention of being an active rather than a sleeping President, as far as her political responsibilities allow.

She assures us that she has every intention of being present to open our History Fair at Bell's Club on Sunday, May 23rd when we look forward to meeting her.



NOTES & QUERIES

Lydney High Street

I have been taken to task by an observant member, Pat Morris, over my article about Lydney High St in the New Regard. She has noticed that the building that I described as a garage in 1916, was in fact a dwelling in the early photo. She is quite right. Close examination of the photo shows a chimney and windows, and another photo, taken from *A Glance Back at Lydney*, by Neil Parkhouse, dated around 1920, shows the building as quite definitely a dwelling, with upstairs windows open.

Another photo, however, also in Neil Parkhouse's book, and dated 'late 1920s', shows the same premises as Hardacres Garage, with an impressive row of vintage cars parked outside the revamped exterior. This is believed to be shortly before Hardacres moved to a larger site in Newerne St, and the premises were sold Letherens. This would fit with the entry in Kelly's Directory for 1931 which Pat has researched, 'Letheren, H.T & Sons, motor garage; all weather coaches & small cars for hire; small or large parties any distance. High Street.'

Pat also raises the point that the original building would appear to be a cottage of a much earlier date, she suggests Tudor or Stuart, which predates the adjacent buildings, which seem to be late 19th /early 20th century. It appears to have been completely revamped before becoming Hardacres Garage, which also raises the interesting question of when cars became so popular – and profitable – in Lydney and the Forest.

Obviously the High street has undergone many changes since the separate villages of Lydney and Newerne merged into one during the industrialisation of the mid 19th century. As so much can be gleaned from close inspection of an old photograph, especially when used in conjunction with other source material like directories and tithe maps, it would seem that the development of Lydney High St would make an interesting research topic.

I am indebted to Pat for her observance, I stand corrected.

Christine Martyn

VERDERERS ELECTION 1ST DECEMBER 2009

With the death of Cyril Hart, the History Society not only lost a President, but the Verderers Court lost their Senior Verderer.

Under a procedure that has lasted for seven centuries a new verderer has to be elected by freeholders of the County of Gloucestershire (excluding Gloucester and Bristol) at a meeting where polling is by a show of hands.

This process is initiated by a writ being sent to the High Sheriff of Gloucestershire, ordering that an election be called.

The High Sheriff fixes a date for the election and gives notice by advertisement and poster and then supervises the election in the County Court at Shire Hall, Gloucester.

So it was on 1st December last, that more than 200 freeholders gathered at Shire Hall in Gloucester to cast their vote.

There were three nominated candidates, David Taylor from Westbury on Severn, Bart Venner from St Briavels, and Maurice Bent from Ruardean. Each candidate was given five minutes to address the meeting. Mr Taylor spoke about the need to 'modernise', and to prepare to defend the Forest from the effects of global warming. Mr Venner spoke about his experience gained working for the Forestry Commission, whereas Mr Bent stated that he was a 'Forester born and bred', and that he would focus on conserving the customs of the Dean.

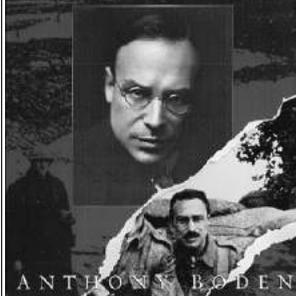
The results of the subsequent vote were that Maurice Bent was elected as the new Verderer with 120 of the votes cast. Mr Venner and Mr Taylor received 85 and 13 votes respectively.

From the point of view of the History Society, we can view the result with some pleasure, as Maurice Bent is not only a well respected author of history books about the Dean, he is also a member of the Forest of Dean Local History Society.

The photograph shows Maurice Bent taking the Oath of Office watched by the High Sheriff of Gloucestershire (Ann Chambers), and the Senior Verderer (Melville Watts)



F. W. Harvey SOLDIER, POET



Averil has been approached by member Roger Deeks to ask for the Society's support for a society to promote the legacy of the man known as the Forest poet, and to foster renewed interest in his life and work.

Will Harvey was born at Minsterworth, and served with a Territorial battalion in the 1st World War. He was a contemporary of Rupert Brooke and Edward Thomas and like them became known as a soldier-poet, publishing evocative poetry from the front, and even from prison camp.

He later retired to Yorkley, where he lived for 30 years, still writing and publishing poetry, and practising as a

solicitor. He was a noted character in the Forest and very popular, not least because he was prepared to take on any case in which he detected injustice, irrespective of any subsequent remuneration. He was nationally acclaimed as a poet in his early years, but in later years has somewhat lapsed into obscurity, except possibly in the Forest.

The Society has been formed to bring belated recognition to our Forest poet and at our last meeting the committee were in unanimous support. A website has been created www.fwharveysociety.co.uk where can be found membership details and a programme of future events, including a talk to the Society on September 11th, as shown on the membership card.

Will Harvey died in 1957, so among our older members there must be some who remember him. The society is creating a 'memory bank' and ask anyone who can contribute to contact Roger Deeks on 01594 517053 or roger.nedstop@btinternet.com

MEMBERSHIP

Owing to a computer error, some members received a membership renewal form which was printed out with the old membership fees on. The updated fees are £8 for a single membership (not £6) and £12 for a family membership (not £9). For those who have paid the incorrect amount, we would be very grateful if you could reimburse the Society the difference, as it would considerably help our finances! Many apologies for the inconvenience. I have enclosed a form with the correct amount on it for those who have not yet paid their fees!

The following members have recently joined, and we welcome them:
Mr P & Mrs M Hastelow, Cheltenham; Mr D J Harrison, Monmouth
Mr I Wright, Bristol

MEETINGS

'Please Sir' must be the words that are engraved upon the mind of Keith Wilks, our speaker who followed the business of the AGM. After serving in the RAF he then trained as a woodwork teacher, in due course rising to become Deputy Head at Five Acres School, later to become known as Lakers. His talk traced the development of the school under the headships of five Head Masters. Discipline, methods of teaching, out of school activities and the planning and construction of the out door swimming pool with the help of his pupils were just some of the snap shots of forty seven years service that were revealed to members.

The life of the Forest of Dean's most well known Politician, Sir Charles Dilke, was explained by John Howe. Dilke was a radical Liberal who served on major parliamentary committees concerned with living and working conditions of the working people and was a very conscientious MP. He visited his constituency regularly and stayed at the Victoria Hotel Newnham, The Feathers in Lydney and the Speech House. Surprisingly for some one of such standing and wealth he didn't have a house in The Forest of Dean but as John Howe pointed out no doubt with his connections he would have been a welcome guest to his friends.

The name Dilke is remembered throughout the Forest because of the hospital that bears his name and which was built in memory of his second wife, Emilia, who predeceased him.

Pete Ralph's talk about the Forest of Dean and its heritage covered a wide range of subjects including standing stones, road building and the wild life which abounds. Some of the slides were familiar while others taken in and around the forest by our speaker were of superb quality. There was some thing for everyone in this talk.

Our next meeting will be held on Sat. 9th January at the Coleford Community Centre (note, not the new centre yet, see below) when Keith Walker will talk about Slag Blocks.

The New Community Centre

Early in December committee members were able to look round the New Community Centre, which is situated off Station Way, Coleford. Although the final finishing and fitting out still had to take place, we were able to see the enormous amount of progress that has been made on this multi-purpose building which will be fitted out to a high environmental standard.

The main hall which the FODLHS will be using is on the first floor and can be reached via the main stair case or the lift. We found the hall to be light and airy and we have been told that comfortable new chairs are on order.

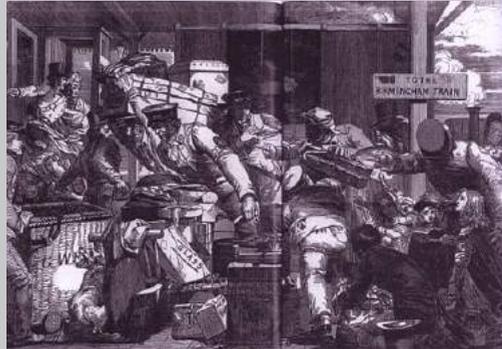
So this, combined with interesting speakers and our new sound system bodes well for enjoyable Saturdays afternoons. We hope to be able to hold our first meeting in the new centre in February 2010, when we look forward to meeting you then to welcome our speaker Helen Brown who will be telling us about the high lights of the Cheltenham collection.

Anne Childs

Future Events

Mini - Conference "Tracks to Tracks"

Our Vice-president Ian Pope will be one of the speakers at a mini-conference with the title 'Tracks to Tracks' to be held on Saturday 13th March 2010 9.30am - 1.00pm at The Frith Centre, Gloucestershire Archives. It will study the economic effects of the Road & Rail Revolution on Gloucestershire and should be of particular interest to our members. The other speaker is Nick Herbert former editor of the Gloucestershire Victoria County History Pre-booking required - refreshments available - Entrance £5 Tel: 01452 425295 or email archives@gloucestershire.gov.uk



Dean Heritage Events

From Jan – March the Dean Photography group is holding an exhibition, July – September celebrates the centenary of the Girl Guides and from Oct – Dec we are commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Severn Bridge disaster. From the 3rd April (Easter weekend) to the 27th June FODLHS will be holding an exhibition in the Community Gallery. 'Regards, Research and Reminiscences' will celebrate the 25th edition of the New Regard, and promote the Society in general and the upcoming History Fair. Tracing the history and development of the New Regard and the FDLHS, with details of both past and present activities, it will hopefully be of interest to both members of the Society and the general public alike.

After a good year for the Centre, with an increase in the number of visitors and takings, there are some exciting plans for 2010. No doubt you have read in the paper about the proposal to install a water turbine at the Centre, which is based on a design that is attributed to Archimedes in the 3rd century, an Archimedes Screw. We are forging ahead with this plan which should produce enough electricity to make the Centre self sufficient in power, as well as being a visitor attraction in its own right.

Watch out for the new events leaflet coming out in January 2010 to find out what other events we have lined up.

Nicola Wynn

Research & Development



Photos for a New Century

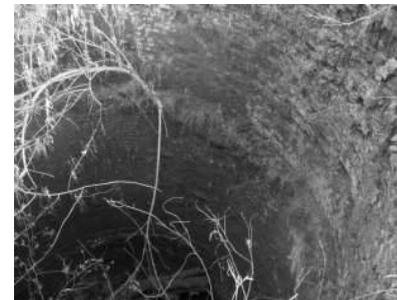
The 100 photographed sites have now been allocated for re-taking. Most of these were taken in 2010 and volunteers have been asked to take the new photographs as near to the ten year interval as practicable.

Database

It is now possible using Microsoft Live Mesh to make the information which is in the database available to Committee Members (Live Mesh is an application which allows users to place information on the internet and share it with named individuals). So far most of the original forms that were completed have been uploaded and can be referred to whenever information is needed. This does not preclude the publishing of selections of information on our website which we will make available to everyone.



The process needed for this is ongoing. The use of Live Mesh will also allow updating of the database, for instance since the data for the Yorkley cricket pavilion was first entered there has been a major upgrading of the building, Averil will be able to copy and edit the old file so that the amended version can be included.



Mine Capping

We have been very pleased with the progress of the negotiations re mine capping. I have been able to visit a site where the Coal Authority have recently been working and was able to see the need for processing some of the old shafts and levels which still exist.

The photograph shows one such disused level entrance and illustrates the dangers associated with such sites. I was also able to see a shaft which had been made safe. This was an air shaft which was in reasonable condition. In such instances the policy is to fix a grill over the shaft and add a stone collar, the result is a very acceptable compromise between the considerations of safety and the desire to preserve remains where practicable.

Ron Beard

VIKINGS ON THE SEVERN??



Viking ship - the figurehead was made by the pupils

We have had an interesting query from Blakeney School about whether the Vikings sailed up the Severn and landed in the Forest. There has long been a local legend that this took place but documented evidence from that long ago is very scarce. It is known that the Vikings landed at Bridgenorth, near Shrewsbury, in 895 so it is possible that they sailed past the Forest en route although whether they landed is not known.

There is also a legend, again undocumented, that a Viking known as Erik Bloodaxe, sailed up the Wye and was beaten in battle by the local tribes at an area still known as the Slaughters, near Symonds Yat. He got his name from his bloodthirsty youth which was spent raiding in Scotland and around the Irish sea so it is possible that he ventured up the Severn estuary. He later became King of Jorvick (York) and was killed in battle in 954.



Steepholme - where the Vikings settled

The Anglo Saxon Chronicle, which is about the only written source material for this period, does recount that in 915 'a great raiding ship-army came over here from the south from Brittany.....and then went around west until they got into the mouth of the Severn and raided in Wales everywhere along the banks where it suited them..... And the king (Edward) had arranged that there should be positions on the southern side of the Severn mouth from Cornwall in the west, eastwards as far as Avonmouth, so that they dared seek land nowhere on that side.....And then they settled on the island at Steepholme (*just off Weston-super-Mare*) until the time came that they were very short of food and many men perished with hunger because they could not get any food; then they went from there to Dyffed and then to Ireland'

Irish history records that the Vikings captured Waterford in 914, where they established a base and from where they raided all the south west coast of Ireland, so it does seem very likely that they came up the Bristol Channel at about that time.

It is on record therefore, that the Vikings were around this area at some time in the early 10th century, so it is not unlikely that they ventured further up the Severn and the Wye, possibly in search of food. I have learnt from my various researches that local legend often has a basis in fact, and that it is unwise to totally disregard it!

We were able to put Blakeney school in touch with a re-enactment Society to perform for the children, who also got involved with dressing up as Vikings, and built a mock up of a Viking ship, which was subsequently burnt in true Viking style.



The Viking Ship gets torched!



Members of Hrafn Broedr from Birmingham, part of the Viking Society who staged a battle



Coin of Eric Bloodaxe



Having 'conquered' Blakeney the Vikings seek a new challenge!