



MONMOUTH AND THE CHARTIST TRIAL

SENTENCED TO DEATH
ON 16TH JANUARY, 1840!!

Read the special article inside!!

THE FOREST OF
DEAN LOCAL
HISTORY
SOCIETY

News

JANUARY 2011

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Editors Notes

Welcome to this issue and a brand new year! You will have received your membership card with this newsletter, and you will see that a very full programme has once again been arranged.

The request, published in the last newsletter, for members to come forward and join your Committee has been successful!

Elsewhere in this issue we introduce you to David Harrison, Brian Thomas, and Cherry Lewis who have all volunteered their services for various roles. David Harrison has also written a very interesting article for this edition on 'Monmouth and the Chartist Trial'. It provides a very pertinent 'taster' for David's talk to the Society in February.

The Committee would still welcome further help, however. The important but non-demanding role of Librarian remains unfilled. Anyone who feels they might be able to take on this role is asked to contact Mary Sullivan, our General Secretary.

In the centre pages you can read how the production of the New Regard has changed. The New Regard can only continue to exist if members write material for it! If you have a germ of an idea for an article and want some help developing it, or you need some guidance in how to use research resources, please contact our new and very friendly Editor of the New Regard, Cherry Lewis. You will find details of how to contact her in the middle pages of this newsletter.

Finally I would welcome short articles, comments, 'letters to the editor', for this newsletter! Every contribution will be very gratefully received!!

Keith Walker

Forthcoming Meetings



A reminder that our next two meetings are being held at the Bream Community Centre, which occupies the former Bream Church of England School in the High Street in Bream.

Please also note that tea is once again on offer after the speaker has spoken, but before questions and the raffle draw.

On Saturday January 15th, at 3pm, John Belcher will speak on 'Industry in Lydney'. John says that *"I will be concentrating on Lydney Tinplate Works, which was an integral part of Lydney life for a century and I had a peripheral childhood experience of. This will be based on a series of articles that I wrote in the Forester newspaper several years ago."*

On Saturday 12th February, at 3pm, David Harrison will be speaking about 'Monmouth and the Chartists'. You can get a flavour of David's talk by reading his article about Monmouth and the Chartist Trial elsewhere in the newsletter.

The Speech Stone

Opposite the main entrance to the Speech House, on the other side of the road, a stone pillar, which traditionally marks the centre of the Forest, lay, for many years in the undergrowth. It was restored to its original position in 1957.

After it was replaced it was unveiled by the Chairman of the Forestry Commission, Lord Radnor, to honour the 90th Birthday of Viscount Bledisloe. It also marked Viscount Bledisloe's fifty years of service to the Forest as a Verderer.



The inscription of the stone reads:-

"This Pillar
Traditionally Marking
The centre of the Forest
was replaced

On the 90th. Birthday of The Viscount Bledisloe P.C. G.C.M.G. K.B.E.
To Commemorate
His 50th Year as Verderer"

The Severn Bridge Disaster by Christine Martyn



The Severn and Wye Railway and its associated tributaries formed a network of lines and links, many of them following the course of earlier tramroads that had served the mines and industrial sites in the Forest throughout the 18th and 19th centuries.

By the 19th century, most of the coal left the Forest by rail, if only as far as Lydney or Sharpness docks and in 1872 an Act of Parliament authorised the building of a rail bridge over the Severn, giving further links with Sharpness docks and the Midland Railway at Berkeley.

Designed by G.W. Keeling and G.W.Owen, it was begun in 1875 and completed by 1879 and formed of a series of bowstring girders on tubular stone pillars with two large spans near to the Lydney side, and nineteen smaller ones. A swing section over the Sharpness to Gloucester canal allowed the passage of canal traffic, which would have originally been sailing ships, up to Gloucester.

The bridge was a testament to the intrepid Victorian engineers who built so many similar structures that have withstood the ravages of time. Not the Severn Bridge however. Doubtless it would be standing yet but for the freak accident that occurred in the small hours of the night of 25th October 1960, just 50 years ago this year. Two oil tankers failed to make the difficult turn against the tide into Sharpness harbour, collided with each other, and losing steerage, drifted on up the river to collide with one of the stone piers. The resulting explosion brought down two spans, and the burning oil spread across the river from bank to bank. Despite heroic rescue attempts by people from both shores, five men lost their lives, and Lydney awoke to the news that their contact with 'the other side' had been broken. A gas main that was carried gas over the bridge was also broken, and cars toured the town warning people not to use their gas stoves.

Another consequence was that schoolchildren, who since the early years of the 20th century had been travelling across the bridge to attend Lydney Grammar School, could no longer do so. Most of them were now re-allocated to Marling School in Stroud, although the elder children, who were in their exam years, were billeted with friends in Lydney for the rest of the year, only travelling home at weekends.

The bridge stood with its gaping hole for a few years, while the subject of repairing it or converting it to road traffic was discussed. By this time, however, the toll road bridge from Sedbury to Aust was under construction, and after it opened in 1966, the decision to dismantle the remains of the old bridge was taken., and between 1967 and 1970 it was dismantled and removed. The foundations on which the pillars stood are still in place, and can be seen at low tide, and every so often, someone comes up with the bright idea of rebuilding it!



New volume of VCH Vol XII

Covering: Newent and May Hill, North-West Gloucestershire: Bromesberrow, Dymock, Huntley, Kempsey, Longhope, Newent, Oxenhall, Pauntley, Preston, Taynton

In October I went to the launch of Vol XII of the VCH which was held at Bromsberrow Place. There was a presentation of complimentary copies and a sad farewell to Dr. John Jurica one of the editors who has worked on the VCH volumes for nearly 30 years. John spoke about his time working with Dr. Nick Herbert who retired a few years ago and then went on to say that Nick had taught him a great deal about how to set out and concisely précis articles for the volumes.

Sir Nicholas Mander the Chairman of the trustees of the VCH then voiced his concern about the future of the VCH. Financial pressures mean that existing project funders have been obliged to reduce their commitment to the VCH. So to ensure that the research and publication of the volumes continues The Gloucestershire County History Trust has been established. This trust will create new opportunities for the public to contribute to the development of the Victoria County History, so that the whole of the historic county including South Gloucestershire can be covered.

It will be many more years before the completion of the County's history and a professional historian will need to be employed to co-ordinate the efforts of volunteer contributors to the work. In order to do this it is estimated that around £60,000 a year will be required.

Local societies and their members are being asked to help financially by donating either a one off sum or by subscribing a monthly amount say £10. All donations should be sent to *Dr James Hodsdon, Hon. Treasurer, Gloucestershire County History Trust, 49 Pittville Crescent Lane, Cheltenham, GL52 2RA*

This is particularly pertinent to FODLHS as Vol XII did not quite cover all the parishes in the Forest of Dean. These remaining parishes will be featured in Vol XIII when the funding becomes available. Meanwhile you can see draft outlines of some of the completed parishes to be included in this next volume (Bulley, Elmore, Lassington, Minsterworth, Rudford & Highleadon, Sandhurst, Tibberton, Upleadon) The VCH web site is www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk/ and you can look under the 'Work in progress section'.

The other volumes relating to the Forest of Dean can be viewed on line:

Gloucestershire Volume V - The Forest of Dean

Gloucestershire Volume X - Upper Severnside and Tidenham

Averil Kear

Meet Your Committee!



Your editor is aware that the Committee members may well be nothing more than names on the back of your membership card for those of you that are not able to attend our meetings. It is time therefore to change this, so, taken at the December meeting, the photograph above shows your Committee in session.

Clockwise from left, Cecile Hunt (Treasurer and Vice Chair), Brian Thomas (New Regard Producer), Averil Kear (Conservation & Enquiries Officer), Liz Berry (Membership Secretary), Dave Tuffley, Mary Sullivan (General Secretary), Ron Beard (Chairman), Cherry Lewis (New Regard Editor and Publicity Officer), David Harrison (Indoor Meetings Secretary).

Missing from the photo are Sue Gordon Smith (Publications Officer), and Keith Walker (Newsletter Editor and Webmaster).

Your Committee has a vacancy for a Librarian, anyone interested in taking on the role is asked to contact Mary Sullivan (General Secretary).

All Change for the 'New Regard'

As you may be aware, Mary Atkins and Pat Williams have stepped down from their roles in editing and production of the New Regard, and have retired from the Committee. This left your Committee with a real challenge in deciding how to continue the production of the New Regard to the very high standards set by Mary and Pat. Luckily some talented people have recently joined the Committee, with very relevant experience in publishing and editing.

The New Regard will now be produced by Brian Thomas (who introduces himself below). Brian will be aided by a sub-committee comprising Cecile Hunt, Cherry Lewis and Keith Walker. Cherry (who tells us more about herself below), is undertaking the role of Editor.

Anyone who is currently preparing an article for the New Regard is invited to send it to Brian Thomas in the first instance (brian.thomas@waitrose.com). If you are thinking of writing an article in the future, please contact Cherry Lewis (cherry11lewis@aol.com). Also if any authors are excited by the thought of being commissioned to write an article on a defined subject, then please contact Cheery Lewis. Finally the sub-committee asks that all articles that are offered for publication should be 'fully illustrated', i.e. be supplied with relevant photographs, illustrations etc.



Meet Brian Thomas the new Producer of the New Regard:

"Born in Port Talbot in South Wales. I went to art school in London to study graphic design. After finishing I worked at Radio Times for over thirty years in a number of roles. My interest in local history has grown after moving to the Forest ten years ago. Our current home is a 17th century barn."

Introducing Cherry Lewis, the new Editor of the New Regard:

"Dr. Cherry Lewis has an interest in the history of medicine and science, specifically the history of geology on which she has published several books. She was formerly Chair of the Geological Society's history division and worked at the University of Bristol as an editor and press officer."



Wye Valley - Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

The Wye Valley AONB organisation is in 2011 celebrating '40 years since the Wye Valley was designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty'.

They are asking if anyone has got images, either photos or videos, of the Wye Valley 40 years ago. They need the images for an exhibition describing 'then and now', and any interesting stories about the Wye Valley and it's population in the era of the 1970's.

If you can help with stories or images, please send an email to Nikki Moore (information@wyevalleyaonb.org.uk)

Mark Harper M.P.

Our MP Mark Harper, in a letter of 7th December, has pointed out that the letter sent to some of the members of the society on 23rd November contained two mistakes.

The statement that "*Mark Harper is responsible for taking the Public Bodies Bill through the Commons stages which started on 23rd November*" was incorrect. Mark Harper wishes to point out that he had no responsibility for the Public Bodies Bill and is not taking it through the House of Commons. Secondly the Bill has yet to enter the House of Commons and is still being debated in the House of Lords.

We wish to apologise to Mark for these errors.

Membership

Thank you to members who have paid their subscription for 2010/11. For those who have not, it saves your Society postage if you arrange to pay before January, as I can include your membership card with this January newsletter.

We would like to welcome the following new members to the Society:

Mr J and Mrs L Rudge, Cinderford
Mr P and Mrs S Wilks, Coleford
Mr J Clegg, Lydney
Ms Coleen Sadler, Berry Hill
Ms V Stubbings, Kent
Mr J, Mr D and Mrs C Martin, Coleford
Mr B Griffiths, Ross-on-Wye
Ms A Cole, Mitcheldean
Mr C Hook, Malvern.

We are sorry to announce the recent death of one of our members, Joyce James of Kimberley Drive, Lydney. She was 86.

MONMOUTH AND THE CHARTIST TRIAL

SENTENCED TO DEATH ON 16TH. JANUARY, 1840



Monmouth feared and hated the Chartists! They shuddered at the very thought of those men from the Welsh valleys, “the men of the black domain”.

When the three ringleaders of the so-called Newport Rising of 1839 were condemned to death, an anonymous Monmouth doctor wrote to Mr. Ford, the County Gaoler, offering his surgical knowledge of decapitation. The good doctor was keen to perform the grisly operation single – handed. His offer was politely declined.

When the three judges donned their black caps on 16th January, 1840, they knew that the barbarous sentence for High Treason involved a revolting outrage on the bodies of the dead. Mercifully, in 1814, disembowelling while still alive had been abolished. Nevertheless, the Lord Chief Justice, his voice quivering with emotion, passed the following sentence: “The three condemned men are to be drawn upon a hurdle to the place of execution. They are to be hanged until dead. Their heads are to be severed from their bodies and be at the gracious disposal of Her Majesty”.

Thanks to many petitions and the considerable tenacity of the very fair-minded Lord Chief Justice, who thought the verdict unsafe, the capital sentences were remitted upon condition that the prisoners be transported for the term of their natural lives. Zephaniah Williams and William Jones never returned from Van Diemen’s Land. In fact they did not want to return to the savage Victorian Britain which had sentenced them. John Frost, however, after a banishment of 16 cruel years wished to return home at the age of 70.

The successful conclusion of the Crimean War led to the granting of Full Pardons for political prisoners. On 11th August, 1856 Frost arrived back in Newport where the horses were removed from the flower-decked carriage and he was drawn triumphant through the welcoming crowd. Outside the Westgate Hotel they stopped and simply cheered and cheered, Frost courageously assured all present that he held the same opinions that he had espoused 17 years ago.

In November, 1839, the people of Monmouth were shocked by the Newport Rising which left 22 dead in front of the Westgate Hotel and at least 50 injured. The *Merlin* (09/11/39) stated “The last sad scene in the Chartist delusion has been played with a melancholy loss of life. The misguided and infatuated dupes had been kept in a state of ferment and Treason had raised her head to desecrate Monmouthshire”

Chartism was significant as the first real working class movement in Britain, long before the advent of Trades Unions and the Labour Party. The Rising was also a tragic affair

because Newport’s Mayor, Thomas Phillips, had ordered the 45th Foot to fire three murderous volleys into the mob, thereby killing physical – force Chartism in Wales for ever.

Monmouth hosted the last mass High Treason Trial in Britain. For five winter weeks the eyes of Britain were focused on this quiet, Georgian market town. Soldiers at the White Swan Hotel (White Swan Court) were ever present in the town. They patrolled the approach roads and accompanied the prisoners to and from the County Gaol on the Hereford Road. At the impressive Shire Hall the wretches in chains were held in holding – cells down below, before making their appearances in the candle-lit court room.

Monmouth society at the time of the Chartist Trial was still hierarchical. At the top, distant because of rank and resident at Badminton, was his Grace, the Duke of Beaufort, who used his agent at Troy House to control his interests in the town and county.

Next came the squirearchy, landed gentry like the Crompton-Roberts, Walwyns and Rolls. They managed their estates, acted as county magistrates, attended Quarter Sessions, entertained lavishly and acted as Chairmen of many societies.

Below them, and mainly within the town, was a select conservative establishment of doctors, clerics, barristers, army officers and industrialists. A more radical element was composed of surgeons, builders, butchers and river merchants.

At the bottom of the pyramid this fairly rigid structure contained artisans, labourers and the poor. In 1834 / 40 Monmouth’s town population just exceeded 5,000 (approximately half of the figure for 2011). Importantly, for these were meeting places where opinions and ideas were exchanged, the number of public houses came to 48, plus beer houses, a total of 56.

As the century wore on, the power and patronage of the Somersets began to give way to the benevolent authority of the Rolls family of the Hendre, but in 1839, their feudal like hold remained strong.

The Lord Chief Justice’s summing up proved to be the main sensation of this Show Trial. It soon became evident from the start that he was labouring for an acquittal. He pointed out that the Crown had abandoned its contention that the object of the rioters was to establish the People’s Charter as the law of the land. Sir Nicholas Tindal repeated that it was not for Frost to prove his innocence, but for the law officers of the Crown to prove his guilt. The conclusion, to the embarrassment of Counsel, was his insisting in the strongest terms, on the need for complete certainty before a verdict of guilty could be found.

A Monmouth Jury, however, could not be shaken. They announced before retiring, that they did not think it would take them long to reach a verdict. They were offered food and drink but were back in less than half an hour. The foreman, John Daniel of Abergavenny, gave their unanimous decision- “Guilty”. Yes, Monmouth feared and hated the Chartists.

David J Harrison MA

Indoor Meetings



We now have a new Indoor Meetings Secretary, David Harrison, who introduces himself below:

“David Harrison spent the first 21 years of his life in Landore, Swansea, on the ‘wrong side’ of the tracks. For 42 years he lived and worked in Wimbledon. But for all his life he has loved Monmouth and the Forest of Dean. Now retired he is free to indulge his historical interests and has just published a long overdue booklet ‘Monmouth and the Chartists’”.

WORKHOUSES IN THE FOREST

O Evil Day! On Saturday, 4th. December, 2010, the terrible Workhouses returned to the Forest. The harbinger of such malignancy was Cecile Hunt, FODLHS. Vice-Chairman and Treasurer. Mind you, the well attended meeting at the Coleford New Community Centre, on such a freezing day, were prepared to be shocked. They knew, or they thought they knew, of the horrors suffered by Oliver Twist and his unfortunate mother.

Workhouses, in Cecile’s words, “were a blight upon a Christian society, where babes of over six months were taken from their mothers, brothers separated from sisters and old and decrepit married couples riven asunder as soon as they darkened the threshold of the hated Workhouse”. Through the miracle of technological projection, when it was got to work, the appreciative audience viewed many of the Forest’s old Workhouses from Geo-Maps and aerial views, their Bastille-like natures alive again.

The Poor Law Amendment Act, [1835], deliberately set out to make the Workhouses an unattractive option whose regime of work and monotonous diet revolts us still. Any recourse was better, even dependence on occasional charity rather than suffer the degradation and indignity of becoming a Workhouse pauper. The lowest of the low, an in-mate. Collectively we gave silent thanks for our present circumstances.

Superficially, Cecile’s well researched talk appeared to skirt the surface of the provision of the Union of groups of Parishes in providing Workhouses throughout the Dean, but regular nuggets of information were thrown up. The idiot who was incarcerated in Coleford Workhouse for 43 years; the Gloucester pin manufacturers who demanded value for money; the farmers who depended on pauper farm-hands through years of bad harvests, etc.

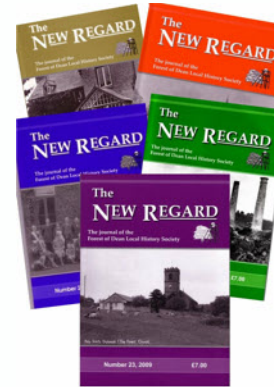
All in all this splendid talk brought the all too recent past alive and a pleasing multitude of questions from the floor must have delighted the speaker. Thankfully, before the frost turned to ice we journeyed home, the Workhouses, with their concomitant horrors, had been replaced in their box and the lid firmly secured. After all it was only a memory, increasingly distant.

David J Harrison

SPECIAL OFFERS!



Complete Your Collection of New Regards!



We can now offer past issues of the New Regard issues 19, 20, 21, 22 and 23 for sale at the **special price of £3.50**.

You can find out about the contents of these issues at our website:

<http://www.forestofdeanhistory.org.uk/LHSnrprevious.html>

Another special offer is our **Miner’s Memorial CD**. Members can buy copies for the **reduced price of £10**.

As well as the record of mining casualties, these CDs include details, including some superb pictures, of nearly all the former mine sites, many of which are now nearly obliterated by the woodland. So the CD is an excellent record of our industrial history which could otherwise be lost forever and would make a very acceptable present.



We would like to remind you that there are still a few of our **specially commissioned mugs** available. There are two designs, one showing our Roll of Honour Memorial at New Fancy and the other showing Trafalgar Arch.

The back of each mug has the name of the Society together with our logo. Caldwell Creations who designed and made the mugs have assured us that they are dishwasher friendly and make a really good cup of tea or coffee. They are now available at the **special price of £2.50 each**.

You can buy the issues of the New Regard, mugs and CDs at our meetings or buy the New Regards and CDs online at our website www.forestofdeanhistory.org.uk