

# FOREST OF DEAN LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

*news*  
January 2014

Its that time of year again!  
Light the fire, draw up a chair,  
and read a good book.

See our book reviews on the back cover!

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DEAN LOCAL  
HISTORY  
SOCIETY

## News

**JANUARY 2014**

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## Editors Notes

We have a very full newsletter this month, so may I say 'thank you' to all of you who provide articles and news for inclusion in the newsletter. It means I can actually be an editor! Having said that, I am always looking for short articles (up to 1000 words) for inclusion in this newsletter. If you have never written an article before, just give it a go! - You can choose the subject, and maybe writing for the newsletter might inspire you to go on to greater things and perhaps produce some material for the New Regard!

As Cecile writes in her column, the WWI Research Project is well under way, and we currently have expressions of interest from 15 members, of whom 11 have nominated a subject of interest for research as part of the project. However we have 38 possible subject headings so there are plenty of areas left to research. Perhaps you have your own ideas for research? There is still time to get involved in the WWI Project, so please contact Cecile or myself if you would like to discuss how you might get involved.

The History Society is a member of Gloucestershire Local History Association which is an umbrella organisation for local societies in Gloucestershire. Our Vice-Chairman and Treasurer (Mary Sullivan) represents us at meetings of the GLHA. In 2014 the GLHA Annual Regional Meeting will be hosted by the Forest of Dean Local History Society and events are planned in and around St Briavels on 12th July between 2pm and 5pm, so please mark the date in your diary now. Further details about the programme of events will be included in the April newsletter.

If you are looking for reading material to entertain you through the long dark nights of winter, then you cannot go far wrong with the latest exceptionally interesting New Regard ("Cinderford Through The Years")! Once you have read that, then perhaps you might like to try the books reviewed on the back cover, they are both extraordinary publications in different ways!

*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.*



## News From The Chair *with Cecile Hunt*



As you will see from your new membership card we have a full programme of indoor and outdoor events for the coming year. This year there will again be two coach trips, one to 'distant places', and a local one digging into the iron mining heritage of the Forest of Dean. As you may have noticed the format of the indoor meetings have been changing, with short presentations in addition to the main, advertised, presentation. This format has proved to be popular, so will continue. The committee found that by re-introducing the tea-break a couple of years ago, and then introducing short presentations, the indoor meetings are more lively and much more of a social event.

Following on from the success of New Regard number 28, "Cinderford through the Years", Ron Beard has kindly agreed to lead a walk around some of the places featured in the article; see the membership card for details. Published in October, this edition of the New Regard quickly sold out and had to be reprinted before the society's November meeting. Demand is still high, so if you haven't already got your copy buy one soon as there are no plans for a further reprint.

The society's latest project on the Home Front in the Forest of Dean during World War One is progressing. Keith Walker has put in many hours at Cinderford Library working his way through the microfiche of the local newspapers for the period 1914 -1918. He has photographed articles relevant to World War One, sorted them into categories and copied the resources to a CD. For anyone interested in researching WW1 the newspaper articles are a good start. Several of the categories have been taken by members who have volunteered to write an article, but there are still some left - if you are interested in being involved please contact either Keith Walker or myself - contact details are to the left. The results of the research will be used in displays at Gloucestershire Archives and Dean Heritage Centre. Currently we are looking to gather the outcomes of the research into a society publication and possibly a CD as well. Authors of articles will all be recognised and each article will be individually acknowledged.

Back in the spring members were asked if they would be interested in a guided visit around the Soldiers of Gloucestershire Museum and there were enough members interested to make this viable. However the museum is currently closed so please watch for announcements by Cheryl Mayo on possible visit dates. If you would like to add your name to the waiting list please contact Cheryl - see the opposite page for details.

The society's new website provider is currently revamping our website. Keith Walker (our current webmaster) will gradually hand over the role to David Harris. May I take this opportunity of thanking David for stepping forward to take over the role of Web Editor and also to Cheryl Mayo for coming forward as a 'non-technical' user to monitor the content, and ease of use of the new website. If anyone is interested in offering assistance to the website team, please step forward!

May I say a big thank you to all members who have paid their subscriptions in a timely fashion. Please be aware that If you have not yet paid your subscription this will be the last newsletter you will receive!

Wishing you all a happy and peaceful 2014.

## Conservation Piece *with Simon Moore*



As you will be aware we have been in a recession, the result of which is a lack of interesting Planning Applications for me to look at on your behalf; Barn conversions seem to have run their course, as most decent barns have already been converted and those yet to be done have stalled due to the high cost of conversion and the increased demands of the Building Regulations over thermal insulation and carbon emissions; Owners of listed buildings seem reluctant

to embark on ambitious alteration and refurbishment schemes, waiting, I'm sure, to see which way the wind blows when we emerge from the doldrums.

However, Cinderford Regeneration Board are still in full sail, and determined to push ahead with their plans to save Cinderford by developing land around the Steam Mills Lake and the site of the former Northern United colliery. After many years of ignoring our numerous attempts to get them to look at incorporating the old colliery buildings into the scheme, they have now approached us to join a newly formed Forum to advise the Board on Heritage issues. Whilst we might take the cynical view that this is too late, just a box ticking exercise around 'community involvement', a committee with 'no teeth'; Cecile and I have taken the view that we have to keep trying, and working from within an organisation is often better than besieging it from without!

For Northern United 50% of the buildings have now been demolished, leaving only the former Office, Canteen and Bath house standing... saved, for the time being, by the Bats that are in residence. We must move on....our mission now is to ensure that our heritage is celebrated and marked by appropriate information boards, events and memorials; that the Boards commitment to proper investigation of the industrial archaeology, and recording of finds, is adhered to; That Cinderford's history and industrial heritage is understood and respected by both the Board and future generations.

Our Friends in the wildlife groups continue to plug away at stopping the development, they have very strong grounds to do so and will continue to get our support, but for the History Society, we have done what we can to inform the regeneration board, Homes and Community Agency and the District Council of the importance of this site. Whilst we leave nature to continue with plan 'A', we must look to plan 'B'!

***Question: How should we mark, commemorate, recognise the site of 'The Bridge' at Cinderford?...work will start over the next year or so on improving the road junction, and as part of this it is planned to erect a 'something'.....stone has been salvaged from the old pub and is in store.....any ideas?***

## Lost Houses - Part One by Cecile Hunt

Dwellings come and go through the centuries, some leave a mark upon the landscape; others do not. Many houses large and small have disappeared throughout time - never to be remembered. When buildings were made of mud, turf and wood they were not built to last. As building materials became more robust structures began to leave their 'thumb print' upon the landscape. They may have been pulled down, built around, extended, reused for another purpose, i.e. barn conversions - but have they disappeared without trace?



A second look at altered buildings, derelict structures, lonely stone walls, mysterious lumps and bumps in fields, paths and roads that apparently lead nowhere could lead to a lost history. You never know what history might be uncovered. Imagination, theory and hypothesis can all take place; but remember it is the prime and secondary data that will give a more accurate insight into their history.

Among a few of the many dwellings that have disappeared from our landscape, some in living memory, is Duni House located in Minsterworth. A red brick wall set back on the hill beside Duni Farm probably had some connection to this house. The illustration above shows a map downloaded from the internet. In this case it shows both the House and Farm as they were in 1889. The 1881 census extract (below) shows that a retired solicitor, William Ellis, was living in Duni House, together with several servants. Some other large houses now no longer with us include Highmeadow House, Newland. This estate belonged to the Hall family; the house was demolished in about 1804. Shutters from the house can be seen in the restaurant of The Angel Hotel, Coleford – how many more artefacts are scattered around the locality that once belonged to this estate? What were the farm outbuildings and the 'Kennel Field' are still visible.

At Wynols Hill, Coleford a housing estate was built on the site of what was Wynols Hill House. A house was recorded on this site in about 1499. In the mid 17th century records show a house being built which may have been the Wynols Hill House used during WWII as a prisoner of war camp, and demolished sometime after the war to make way for housing.

Awre parish records indicate that Woodend Lane, which runs behind the Red Hart Inn, led into a hamlet called Woodend. The river Severn has apparently, over the centuries, claimed the houses that made up this hamlet. According to Rudder, 1779, in Awre parish "there is a common near the river... called Old Warth above a mile long, and about half a mile broad. This is an ancient village...". The lane now ends in a gate; the field beyond the gate is very uneven which could indicate some sort of activity having taken place there in the past.

The undermentioned Houses are situate within the Boundaries of the											
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## 100 Years of Yorkley Institute *by Averil Kear*

On the 26<sup>th</sup> October 1910 a formal application with plan to build an Institute at Yorkley was sent to Whitemead Park to V.J. Luse the Deputy Surveyor of Woods from Harry Jones Secretary of the recently formed Yorkley Institute Committee. In the application, Harry Jones said: *'As we are desirous of opening the institution before Christmas, I am desired to ask if you would advise our commencing the excavations at once'*. The next day V.J. Luse forwarded the plan and application to the Deputy Surveyor, Dean Forest, stating *'club much wanted, building to be on the same lines as Bream... the proposed site is waste Forest'*.

Things proceeded quite quickly and on 3rd November 1910 Harry Jones wrote to Sir Stafford Howard saying: *'I beg to accept the offer contained in your letter of 2nd Nov 1910 of permission to enclose a piece of land at Yorkley to erect a temporary building.'*

The Institute was erected by Messrs Harbarow of Bermondsey and the opening was featured in the newspaper of the 27th January 1911. The official opening had taken place on Friday 20th January 1911 with the ceremony being performed by T.H. Deakin. The report states that the *'Institute is already being used for the purpose for which it is intended'*. It continues by saying that *'The building, which was commenced late in the summer of last year is a fine erection standing on the brow of the hill known as the Bailey. The building which is heated throughout by coal stoves, is divided into three rooms, one of which is set aside wholly for billiards. In the other two rooms provision is made for the playing of the usual popular games, and the reading of newspapers and periodicals'*. Rev Elsom, who was the chairman for the evening, gave some interesting figures with respect to the cost of the building and furnishing it. He also said that *'In the first place he should like to tell them that the people concerned with the Institute were those living in Yorkley and locality. They did not know anything about churches or politics or social differences. They were a band of men united together for instituting and endeavouring to carry on this centre of recreation and of helpful pastime'*

Continuing Rev Elsom stated that the cost of the actual building amounted to £193 9s. The work had been given to the London firm of Harbarow because of their reputation for buildings of this kind. They then spent £11 5s on the heating and the lighting cost a further £19 10s. He also said that *'They were very successful in procuring an excellent second-hand billiard table from Bristol for the sum of £37'* To furnish the Institute they bought chairs and some small tables amounting to £7 4s and a further £10 was spent on the purchase of *'dominoes and other forms of pastimes'*. The final total required amounted to £279 4s. The money was raised through a loan for £250, local donations and a concert in the local school. Rev Elsom said that already 90 people had become members of the Institute paying a subscription of 3/- for six months or 5/- for 12 months. Mr Deakin, after declaring the Institute officially open said that he thought that the



building ought to help young men of the neighbourhood but he did offer one word of warning *'especially to young married fellows'* in saying that *'He hoped that they would not stay there hour after hour in the billiard room when they ought to be at home making their wives the happier and their homes the brighter'*. Rev Cass (Vicar of Bream) replied to this that *'Never once had he had a complaint from mother or wife with regard to the son or husband spending too much time in the Institute. He continued by saying that 'The difficulty was to get young men into the Institute, and to get them to attend regularly. He had on several occasions been thanked by mothers and wives for what he had done for their boys and husbands in connection with the Institute. He also hoped the time would come when their cricket and football clubs would be joined to the Institute, and that they would also start ambulance and debating classes and a library.'*

The need for a recreation ground adjacent to the Institute was solved in 1920 when the Deputy Surveyor wrote to Mr Stanley Ellway, Hon Sec Yorkley & District War Memorial Committee saying: *'It was agreed to allow a recreation ground of 4a 2r 19p and that the annual rental to the Commissioner of Woods for this ground should be 5/- p.a. Also 'No erection other than seats or a band stand of a design to be approved by this Department are to be erected on the ground without the consent in writing of the Commissioner of Woods'*.

In 1922 records state *'A memorial to the fallen in the war has already been erected the ground cleared and fenced and the surface being laid for cricket and football at great expense so the War Memorial Committee are now asking for the promised donation of £25'* In 1929 an agreement was drawn up allowing the Miners Welfare Fund Committee to take

over the running of the Institute and the Recreation Ground. Rental to be 5/- p.a. for Recreation Ground and 5/- p.a. for Institute payable to Deputy Surveyor, Dean Forest.

In 1975 the recreation ground, was formally given to the village with responsibility for its management being vested in the Trustees and Committee of the Hall. The committee was made up of representatives of organizations that used the facilities including the football club, Yorkley School, and Viney Hill Church. Since then, the children's play area; skate park and football club changing rooms have been added, but as time moves on the 100 year old "Old Green Hut at the top of the hill in Yorkley village" has deteriorated considerably, and so the current committee have had to accept that due to the age and condition of the existing building, the best thing would be to raise funds to build a new hall whilst undertaking essential repairs to the existing building enabling its continued use.

In 2013 the Institute received a huge grant of £500,000 from National Lottery to build a new village hall. The work is to be started in 2014 and at last Yorkley and Pillowell will have a warm, dry and fully functional hall.

## Meetings In Review *with Joyce Moss*

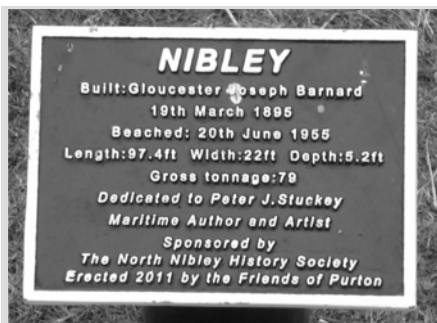
The meeting in October featured a talk by Ian Wright on **“Walter Virgo and the Blakeney Gang.”**

In the 1890's, the local papers sported such headlines as “The Blakeney Outrages”, and “A Reign of Terror”. These comments need to be set against continued attempts to enclose the Forest to its statutory 11,000 acres for timber and exclude the people from grazing their animals there. The Crown frequently ordered the removal of sheep from the Forest. This caused conflict between the crown officials and commoners.



Most Freeminers, by this date, had become wage earners in the deep pits and their working life was tough. Fierce resistance met a plan in 1875 to buy off commoners rights, in return for small plots of land. These “rights”, like sheep keeping, supplemented miner’s wages but poaching was also rife. Walter Virgo was born in 1845 and his family had run animals in the Forest for centuries. He, like his sons and friends, were poorly paid colliers. Even though, by 1855, a Trades Union had been formed, strikes and lockouts were common in depressed times when the owners tried to cut wages. It was not surprising the men poached and owned sheep to feed their families. From 1869 to 1900, Walter Virgo’s name and those of his sons and associates constantly appear in the local court records for stealing wood and sheep, carrying unlicensed guns, poaching, being drunk and brawling. The police talked of an organized criminal gang in Blakeney. In 1805, the JPs and the Deputy Surveyor decided on the enclosure of Blakeney Hill and the removal of sheep. This set off a number of incidents – in 1896, a steam sawing machine was destroyed and parts of the Forest set on fire. Though Blakeney Hill was enclosed, as a response to the unrest, the Crown decided to allow commoners sheep on “sufferance” in the Forest, as it was impossible to remove them.

The Blakeney Gang can be considered a bunch of poor and disaffected petty criminals or engaged in covert action against the authorities, who certainly believed them to be dangerous. Customary rights had been fought for over centuries in the Forest. In 1919, the commoners became a Protection Society. The Commoners Association still goes strong and is usually now able to negotiate with the Forestry Commission over its “rights”.



It is a rare example of an unspoilt c19 harbour, built for sailing ships. The increased industrialization of the Forest in the c19 caused the development of a new port where the Lyd enters the Severn.

November’s meeting saw Paul Barnett giving a talk on **“Lydney’s Lost Fleet”**. Paul is an expert on the 80+ ships in the Purton Graveyard. These were piled up, from 1909 onwards on the other side of the river, to shore up the bank between the Severn and the Sharpness Canal, in view of the erosion and strong tides experienced there.

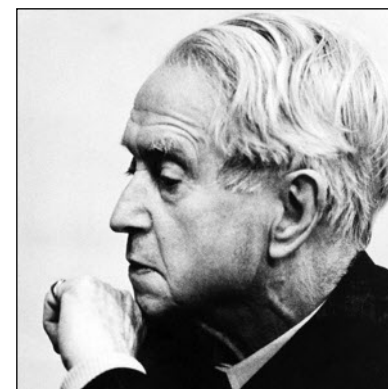
We saw old slides of Lydney Harbour and some of the ships using it in the last two centuries.

It is a rare example of an unspoilt c19 harbour, built for sailing ships. The increased industrialization of the Forest in the c19 caused the development of a new port where the Lyd enters the Severn.

As the river had long silted up, a new harbour was built between 1810 and 1823 by the Severn–Wye Railway Company, to be accessed by a canal to Lydney and a tramway. Originally, the harbour was used to export coal, iron ore, tinplate and stone from the Forest. The imports varied and often came from Avonmouth – silks, spices and African hard wood being examples of exotic goods. The harbour was last used for ships in the 1970's but it was made a Scheduled Ancient Monument in 1980. Between 2003 and 2005, it was fully restored, with grants and is now a marina and the HQ for Lydney Yacht Club. The canal up to Lydney, still unrestored, is a haven for wildlife and a great place for walks.

The lost fleet consists of about 25 hulks, often disused and worn out. These were flat-bottomed Severn Trows which could carry up to 40 tons of coal and some barges and they are beached on the Severn Bank outside the harbour to prevent erosion as at Purton. They often

December’s meeting saw Maurice Bent and John Yonge give a mixed media presentation on **“Herbert Howells CBE”**, the Forest’s most famous musician.



Born in 1872 in Lydney, his father was a painter and decorator, who played the organ at the local Baptist church. Aged 11, Herbert moved to the parish church to join the choir. In 1905, funded by the Bathurst family, he started organ lessons at Gloucester Cathedral. He was greatly influenced by the music of Vaughan Williams and Elgar as well as sixteenth century English composers like Thomas Tallis.

In 1912 he moved to London to study at the Royal College of Music. Poor health meant he was not conscripted in the First World War. In 1920, he married and joined the staff of the Royal College of Music. Also Music Director of St. Paul’s Girls School, he wrote string quartets, a piano concerto and several overtures.

In 1935, tragedy struck when his nine year old son, Michael, died of polio. His grief was subsumed in a large scale choral work, the Hymnus Paradisi. He also wrote the music for Robert Bridges hymn “All my Hope on God is Founded”. Later as organist at St. John’s College, Cambridge, during the Second World War, he produced many cantatas, anthems and liturgical music for the Church of England. In 1950, Howells had his Hymnus Paradisi performed in Gloucester at the 3 Choirs Festival and this became his most famous work. He is most noted for his church music and he wrote ‘Missa Sabrinensis’ (after the River Severn) for the 3 Choirs in 1954. He continued to compose into his 80s.

After his death in 1983, a memorial was erected in Westminster Abbey. There is a national Herbert Howells Society to promote his works. There is also a Royal Forest of Dean Society, which awards an annual bursary of £1000 to a promising music scholar. This year it was won by Sam Pierce, a trumpet player from Redbrook. There is a very beautiful window in Gloucester Cathedral to commemorate Howells, and locally plaques in Lydney church and outside the house where he lived in Lydney.



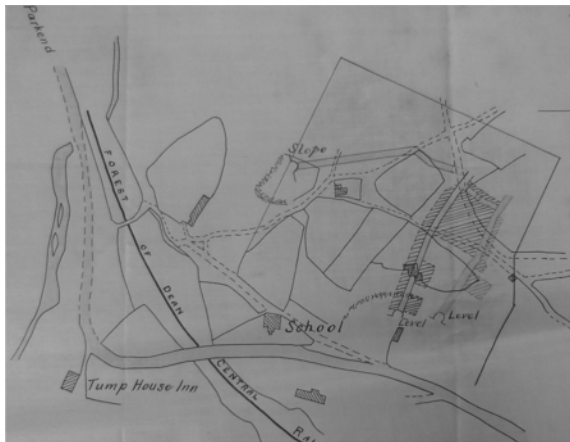
## Meet The Deputy Gaveler - Dan Howell

The Dean Forest Mines Act 1838 is the Act of Parliament which confirmed the Free Miners' exclusive right to the minerals of the Forest of Dean and is the basis for Free Mining today. The Schedules to the 1838 Act give strict rules for working gales within the Hundred of St Briavels. The Gaveler was originally the Monarch, then latterly the Commissioner of Woods, and now is the Forestry Commission as a body. The Dean Forest Mines Act of 1838 is therefore actually administered by the Deputy Gaveler, whose offices are at Bank House, Coleford. The role of Deputy Gaveler was until recently held for 15 years by chartered mining engineer John Harvey MBE, who retired at the end of March 2011. The role is now filled by Daniel Howell, who is assisted by Free Miner James Britton.

Dan is the Grandson of a previous highly regarded Deputy Gaveler Albert Howell MBE. Dan attended the Cambourne School of Mines and worked in his father's colliery in his youth. The post of Deputy Gaveler is part time, but Dan also works as a Land Surveyor for the Forestry Commission. In his role as Deputy Gaveler, Dan is the keeper of ancient records and documents. All the records at Bank House were electronically scanned a few years ago, and Dan also has access to the Coal Authority maps and data, so is able to integrate the old map scanned data into modern maps as needed. Dan is the first Deputy Gaveler to use electronic mapping methods, which apparently make his job a lot easier.



*Dan Howell pictured in the Deputy Gavellers office*



*Typical plan of a mine as recorded and kept in the Deputy Gaveler's records at Bank House. This plan shows Blakeney Stone Mine (otherwise known as Gibraltar Mine)*

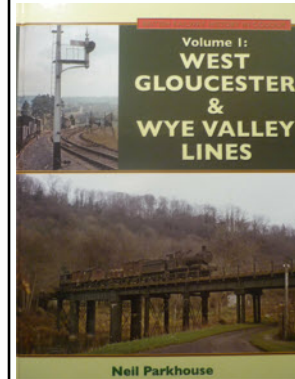
Dan also maintains the official register of free miners and is responsible for the collection of mineral royalties from the worked gales. (The plot of land that a free miner registers to work for coal, stone, iron ore or ochre is known as a gale).

Members who are interested in researching mining history can make an appointment to see Dan at Bank House. He will assist in identifying relevant mining records still held at Bank House.

However older records are kept at Gloucestershire Archives under the references: D5947 and D9096. The online catalogue: ([www.gloucestershire.gov.uk](http://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk)) can be used to view a list of records in the collections.

## New Books Reviewed *by Keith Walker*

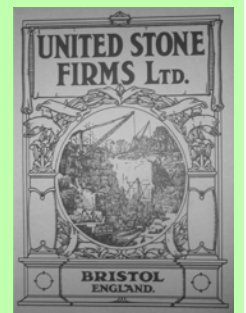
### British Railways History In Colour Volume 1 – West Gloucester & Wye Valley Lines



Produced by Neil Parkhouse of Lightmoor Press, this book is surely his 'magnum opus'. Neil has taken over ten years to assemble an enormous number of splendid colour images for this book from many different sources. As he says himself in the introduction to the book "what I am attempting to do here is present a colour survey of the railway infrastructure of Gloucestershire (and surrounds) as it existed just before the Beeching Report and the great British Railways modernisation plan decimated decades of railway history".

In contrast to many other railway related books, Neil has selected colour images which show not just engines and trains but railway infrastructure; stations, signal boxes, goods yards and engine sheds. The book also features some of the locations that the railway served; docks, quarries and factories. What is particularly striking is the use of maps, tickets and working timetables of the day to provide a snapshot in time, which coupled with the full descriptions associated with every image provides the reader with a proper historical narrative for the many local railway lines featured in the book. Extending to 280 pages, printed on gloss art paper, case bound with printed board covers, this is a beautifully produced book and very highly recommended. Available from local book shops or [www.lightmoor.co.uk](http://www.lightmoor.co.uk), the book is priced at £25.00.

After being out of circulation for 100 years, Forest of Dean Stone Firms has recently published a limited edition print of "**United Stone Firms Limited**". Digitally re-mastered, the book explores the natural stone industry as it was 100 years ago and offers readers a glimpse into early 19th century quarries, both in the Forest of Dean and around the UK. Founded in Bristol, United Stones Firms Ltd set out to offer a wide range of UK and Irish stone under one banner. By 1910 over 25 stone working and quarrying companies had been incorporated into the United Stones Firms company, but unfortunately the First World War seriously affected trade and the business failed in 1917.



The reprinted book is effectively a catalogue describing the different stones available from the various companies, and several colour plates are included to show the more colourful stones. There are many contemporary photographs of the quarries from which the stone was worked, and photographs of buildings and structures on which the stone was used. The book also reveals that the Company owned seven small coasting steamers during its heyday, including the S.S 'Dean Forest'!

This unusual book will quickly become a collector's item as only 1000 copies are available in total, copies are priced to the general public at £35 (soft cover), and £50 (hard cover). Copies will be available online at Amazon and at local Waterstones branches across the county. However FODLHS members can obtain copies of the soft copy version at 20% discount by purchasing directly from the Forest of Dean Stone Works Company at Bixslade Stoneworks, Cannop Road, Parkend (01594 562304).