



FOREST OF DEAN LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

news
July 2011



The Forest at the Crossroads?

Our Chairman talks to the Forestry Advisory Panel

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DEAN LOCAL
HISTORY
SOCIETY

News

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Editors Notes

It is time to say 'thanks' to a few members of the Committee. Averil Kear is leaving the Committee in October and therefore we pay tribute to her extensive activities elsewhere in this issue. Our Chairman, Ron Beard, is completing his three years as Chairman, and we hope he will be staying on the Committee to carry on the excellent work he is doing with the Society Database and many other projects. Cecile Hunt, currently our Vice Chair, is standing for election as Chair at the AGM in October, and will be relinquishing her other role as Treasurer. Her astute management has ensured that the History Society is in good financial health.

Please take a careful look at the 'Future Events' page in this issue. There have been changes to dates and timings and venue of some events when compared with those published on the membership card. In particular we would like to point out the extra event we have planned for Wednesday 17th August. You can join our own Averil Kear for a guided tour of the 'Cathedral of the Forest', (All Saints Church, Newland). Following the tour tea and cakes will be laid on. Please complete and return the booking form to Averil if you are interested in this tour.

The centre pages of this issue carry details of the representations the Society made to the Forestry Advisory Panel during its recent visit to the Forest. You too can make your own contribution to the deliberations of the Panel. The five questions the Panel are posing are reproduced in the centre pages, together with the address to which you should send your 'answers'.

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.

Averil Kear



One of the stalwarts of the FODLHS is retiring from the Committee in October, and it is therefore time to pay tribute to Averil Kear for the sterling work she has done for the History Society over the past 20 years or so.

Averil joined the History Society around 1995, and came onto the Committee whilst Ian Pope was Chairman. She started out by helping Winifred Coones with conservation issues, then moved on to become Publications Officer, ensuring that the New Regard was available for sale in local outlets.

She also worked with Ian Pope and others to put on the first County History Fair in the millennium

year, and has been heavily involved with the organisation of all the subsequent History Fairs. Later she took on the role as Conservation Officer, and a couple of years ago she extended her activities to include the role of Enquiries Officer, using her extensive knowledge and contacts to answer queries directed to the History Society. Not least of her achievements was to be Chair of the Society for three years. She represented the Society on external organisations, including the Gloucestershire Regional Community Council Local History Committee, and was responsible for many of the display stands that the Society exhibited at the annual meetings of the GRCC.

It is probably for her work in conservation that Averil will most be remembered, representing the Society's views on more than 30 issues since 2005 alone. Remarkably at one time during 2009-2010, after the District Council made the Conservation Officer redundant, Averil worked in an unpaid capacity with the planning dept, giving advice on planning applications where they concerned listed buildings or buildings in conservation areas.

Perhaps among the most memorable conservation battles that Averil has fought were those involving buildings associated with old mines. That anything remains at all of the Princess Royal Pithead Baths is undoubtedly due to Averil's indefatigable attitude when facing the now defunct bureaucratic quango, the South West Regional Development Agency. She is currently battling with the Homes and Communities Agency to try and save the remnants of the Northern United pithead buildings. You can read more about this elsewhere in this newsletter.

Averil will remain a member of the History Society, and has committed to helping the new Conservation Officer, who we will introduce in the next newsletter. She will also continue to be actively involved with the committee of the Friends of the Cathedral of the Forest and Hands Off Our Forest (HOOF).

Future Meetings



On **Sunday 10th July** you have the chance to join Chairman Ron Beard and a guest freeminer for a walk up Bixslade.

The walk will include a view of a working freemine, the Union Monument, and many other interesting industrial archaeological remains.

Meet at the Forest of Dean Stoneworks at 3pm.

On **Sunday 31st July**, you can join Kate Biggs for a Circular Walk at Piercefield. Meet at Chepstow Leisure Centre Car Park at 10am.

Please note the change of time and itinerary from that published in the membership card.

On **Saturday 10th September** at 3pm at the West Dean Centre, Bream, Liz Whittle of CADW will speak on 'Overlooking the Wye: The History of Piercefield'.

Please note the change of venue from that published in the membership card.



There is an additional event on **Wednesday 17th August**, when you can meet our own Averil Kear for a tour of Newland Church. Meet at the church at 2pm. Following the tour of the church, you will enjoy tea and cakes. There is a charge of £5.00 per person, but all profits go to the Friends of the Cathedral of the Forest funds.

Please complete the enclosed booking form if you intend to join the tour.

Looking further ahead, on **Saturday 1st October** the Gloucestershire Regional Meeting of Local History Societies is being held at Sir Thomas Rich's School, Gloucester, starting at 2'30pm. The theme this year is 'The Effect of WWII On Gloucestershire Communities'.

Please note the change of date from that shown in the membership card.

Please note the venue change for our meeting on **Saturday 12th November** at 3pm, when Ray Wilson will talk on the "Industrial History of Dean". The meeting will now be held at the West Dean Centre, Bream, not the Belle Vue Centre, Cinderford as published in the membership card.

Northern United



Our Conservation Officer, Averil Kear, has been in touch with the Homes and Communities Agency over the future of the remaining pit head buildings at the Northern United site.

The issue under discussion has been the re-routing of the link road through Cinderford to bring it out alongside the site of the Northern United colliery buildings. The History Society's concern is that this new road could be detrimental to the structure and integrity of the last set of mining buildings in the Forest of Dean, and protection should be given to the last tangible remains of the past industrial history of the Forest of Dean

The Homes & Communities Agency have recently been in dialogue with English Heritage (EH) with regard to the potential listing of the site. In relation to the New Fancy remnant buildings, English Heritage stated that:

"...all the buildings associated with mining and processing of coal were demolished, meaning that the industrial processes which took place are no longer legible in the surviving fabric. The remaining buildings all represent the welfare and administrative functions of the mine, and are very plain and utilitarian style.

In addition, with the exception of the pit-head baths, they are not building types which are specifically associated with the mining industry, and there is nothing intrinsic in their fabric which speaks of the site's former use. All of these ancillary buildings have been subject to damaging alterations."

English Heritage concluded that the site did not merit listing, stating that the buildings " *..are not of sufficient architectural interest and are not intact enough to merit designation in the national context.*" This recommendation was ultimately endorsed by the Minister for Tourism and Heritage.

As a consequence of the failure to achieve listed status for the buildings at Northern United , the Homes and Communities Agency stated that:

" whilst we may succeed in securing a use for the site that retains all or the majority of the buildings at Northern United, advice to date suggests that this is extremely unlikely given the limited scope for adapting the buildings, their poor state of repair and the extent to which they have been found to have been contaminated with asbestos. Nevertheless, we do acknowledge the presence of the Northern United memorial and the HCA would seek to include this within any future proposals for the site. Indeed, discussions within the AAP project team have suggested the creation of a specific heritage visitor centre building or feature incorporating the memorial, together with a place to display images conveying the story of the site. Again, such a facility would have to demonstrate it could be viable over the long term"

On the Way to the Wye

The Forest of Dean Local History Society had a presence at the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty's above event at the Riverside in Ross on Wye on Saturday, June 18th. The day-long event was on a Georgian theme, and was a celebration of the AONB's 40th Anniversary. (Approximately one third of the Dean is in the AONB area). All the participants in the event were in Georgian costume.

Our information board was located in the main marquee, and had a section on Newnham's Georgian High Street, which has remained more or less unchanged for the last 200 odd years, and is therefore of national importance.



Pictured in Ross in Georgian costume are Liz and Dave Berry

As well as many stalls, there were demonstrations and performances throughout the day, with street theatre, Punch and Judy shows, a Georgian quartet playing in the bandstand, sedan chair races and military demonstrations from the Yeomanry cavalry. Mingling with the crowd were also storytellers, drunks and Georgian thieves, who were duly captured and put in the stocks. All in all, a very exciting day!

Liz Berry



Did you know that the Society has over three hundred members? Not only do we have members scattered all over England, but there are members in Scotland and Wales. We also have international members in USA, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia.

We are delighted to welcome three new members to the Society, including one joining our 'International section' in Australia! They are:

Mr R and Mrs S Lemon, Chepstow
Mrs V Brown, Western Australia.

You are no doubt aware that membership fees have been increased, so in consequence I shall be sending letters to some members paying with standing orders, as these need altering. Unfortunately, like petrol, food and so many other things, our costs have also risen!

Liz Berry - Membership Secretary

The Forestry Advisory Panel Hears From the History Society

The Independent Panel on Forestry visited the Dean on Sunday 12th and Monday 13th June.

Representatives of a wide range of organisations met members of the Panel at the Speech House on Sunday evening.

I represented the Local History Society at this meeting. Approximately seventy people attended and were divided into groups for discussions with individual panel members.

I was in the group chaired by John Varley, the Estate Director of the Clinton Devon Estates, who invited opinions on what the Forest of Dean meant to us and what we felt the future of the National Forest Estate should be.

There was a unanimous opinion expressed by our group that we were very happy with the Forest as it was and how it was managed by the Forestry Commission. We felt that nationally there should be no diminution of the Forest Estate, preferring an expansion if anything, and that it should be managed by the Forestry Commission. These opinions seemed to be mirrored by all other groups. There were also strong opinions that the definition of the Forest of Dean, as protected, should be extended to include all other publicly owned woodlands in the district as well as contiguous woodland extending into Herefordshire.

On Monday, in a programme devised by our Vice President, Ian Standing, the panel visited the New Fancy, where Averil Kear and Liz Berry explained the significance of the Geomap and Miners' Monument. They also explained how these had been achieved with the full support of the Forestry Commission.

From the feedback we gained the impression that the panel members were very impressed by the commitment of everyone that they had met and how the local population were so integrated into the Forest. As well as taking note of our opinions they strongly advised that as many people as possible should submit answers to the questions posted on their website. The volume of responses will help to strengthen any case that they wish to present in their final report. I urge you to send your own responses to the questions, and in case you do not have access to the internet the questions, and how you can reply to them, are reproduced on the opposite page.

Ron Beard 18/6/2011



The Forestry Advisory Panel at New Fancy. Photo courtesy of Averil Kear.

Questions Posed by the Forestry Advisory Panel

You can also contribute to the deliberations of the Forestry Advisory Panel. You can obtain further details about the 'Call for Views' via the web link:

<http://archive.defra.gov.uk/rural/forestry/documents/forestry-panel-callforviews-110519.pdf>

Answer the five questions listed below and send your answers by the 31st July to:

Secretariat to the Independent Panel on Forestry, Defra, Nobel House, 17 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3JR

- Q1. What do forests and woods mean to you?
- Q2. What is your vision for the future of England's forests and woods?
- Q3. What do you feel to be the benefits of forests and woods to:
 - a) You personally
 - b) Society as a whole
 - c) The natural environment
 - d) The economy?
- Q4. We would like to hear about your suggestions of practical solutions and good practice which can be replicated more widely.
- Q5. What do you see as the priorities and challenges for policy about England's forests and woods?

Meetings In Review

The Civil War - (31st March)

At precisely 7.30pm on the evening of Thursday, 31st March, 2011, the Chairman welcomed 43 members to the Belle Vue Centre and introduced our Guest Speaker. Mr. Keith Underwood, historian/ artist, is well-known in the Chepstow/ Tintern area in his part-time role as a Cistercian Monk, albeit with a dodgy white beard. This evening, however, he forewent clerical garb to present “The Civil War in Wye Dean” which appeared concurrently in two parts.

Part One-illustrated by power point presentation which ranged from Our Chief of Men-Oliver Cromwell to King Charles 1, the second son of King James 1. There were a large number of well researched period engravings, etc. of significant figures in the local conflict. The illustrations were a great help to an audience struggling to understand the labyrinthine entanglements of the Civil War allegiances.

Part Two-The Talk was delivered in a loud, clear voice, front left, a long way from members sitting extreme right. In setting the period, Keith was outstanding. Using an early 17th century map of the region by Speed he quickly made bullet points: no really good maps available; roads impassable in winter; Forest area particularly difficult terrain; Harvest-time meant mass desertion; an army on the march was usually very strung-out and vulnerable; there was no standard time and communications were parlous. Parliament eventually gained the upper hand with its New Model Army, free from divisions of social class and privilege.

The causes and underlying discontents were examined-Taxes, Religious discord, the attitude of the King, Distrust, the influence of Queen Henrietta Maria, etc.

Deeper water was entered in revealing Keith's magnificent research into the local scene. Comparatively easy to understand the Herbert clan, Somersets, Marquis of Worcester, Edge Hill and Turnham Green. Not so easy to appreciate Duncan Colchester, Colonel Massey, Sir John Winter and William Waller and the crazy doings of Prince Rupert of the Rhine. A good attempt was made to keep the events chronological, but sieges, skirmishes, advances and retreats followed one another in seemingly endless succession.

Most of the audience still remained awake after a full 85 minutes when the tea break loomed into view. To be fair to our well-intentioned speaker, it was a complicated subject which received Keith's best shot. Many local houses and villages such as Littledean Hall and Westbury House peppered the text and brought the horror of Civil War alive and into local context, but it was a rich diet. As it was an evening meeting, many were tired after a long day, some were elderly and on medication and the meal, in part, was difficult to consume. The speaker's splendid efforts, however, were much appreciated.

David J. Harrison MA

Historical Weather Events and the Forest of Dean (9th April)



Chairman, Ron Beard, gave an enlightening and entertaining talk on weather events in the Forest of Dean. He talked of a number of huge storms that had brought down hundreds of trees – storms in 1361, 1662, as recorded by Samuel Pepys and that of 1703 which so impressed Daniel Defoe. Later came a succession of floods, one in 1875 leading to a 20 acre area around Cinderford being under water. Whilst in 1888 Coleford was hit by thunderbolts, one of which went down a chimney and burnt a boy's foot!

The twentieth century had several very hot summers, more floods and a unique ice storm in 1940. Whilst in the terrible winter of 1947, hundreds of inhabitants of Cinderford were out clearing the feet of snow showing Dunkirk-type spirit. Ron showed that the Forest has experienced every excess of weather conditions – and illustrated some with pictures of a little, school-age Ron. What more has the weather got to throw at the Forest of Dean this century?

Mary Sullivan

Medieval Chepstow Tour (12th June)

On a rainy day in old Chepstow town, seven hardy members gathered to join Keith Underwood on a 'Medieval Chepstow Tour'. Keith started by explaining how William FitzOsbern began the construction of the castle after the Norman conquest. The importance of the Castle was emphasised in controlling the crossing point of the River Wye and in providing a base for the Marchers Lords in their efforts to control the Welsh Kingdoms. Keith further explained how the town grew up beside the castle. In 1294 Chepstow was given the right to hold a weekly market and annual fair. The town wall was built about this time.



The intrepid seven had by this time reached the Parish and Priory Church of St Mary. It, like the castle, is Norman in origin, although much rebuilt and extended, particularly in Victorian times. St Mary's was the centre of a religious community with a convent and school, the remains of which are buried under the adjoining car park. In the church Keith showed us the tomb of Margaret Cleyton (pictured), which he has sympathetically restored in recent times. Margaret Cleyton was a formidable lady who was considered in her time to be the richest woman in Chepstow. The walking tour concluded by the riverside where Keith reminded us of the importance of Chepstow as a port in times past.

Keith Walker

Dedication of the Miners' Stained glass window at St Michael's Church, Abenhall



St Michael's Church, Abenhall, has a long association with the Freemaners of the Forest of Dean. A small church, dating back to the 13th century, it is situated in what is now an idyllic pastoral valley although for many centuries it served a mining community, and was the place of worship for generations of miners and iron workers.

This is reflected in the carvings of miners' and smiths' tools on the 16th century font. Another carving of miners tools outside on the west tower dates from about the same date, but was badly defaced by the weather and was replaced by a duplicate in 1982.

Appropriately, it is above this carving that the new Freemaners window has been installed, and was dedicated by the Right Revd. John Went, Bishop of Tewkesbury on Sunday, June 5th. Designed by Thomas Denny, a highly respected ecclesiastical stained glass artist who has made windows for Gloucester and Hereford Cathedrals, it consists of fairly large panes of handmade glass, worked in various modern ways such as acid etching, silver staining and painting, and is a most impressive addition to the church.

The theme was taken from the passage in Deuteronomy which refers to a 'a good land of brooks of water ...that spring out of valleys and hills.....a land whose stones are iron and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass', a perfect description of Abenhall Church in its secluded valley in our ancient iron mining and working region.

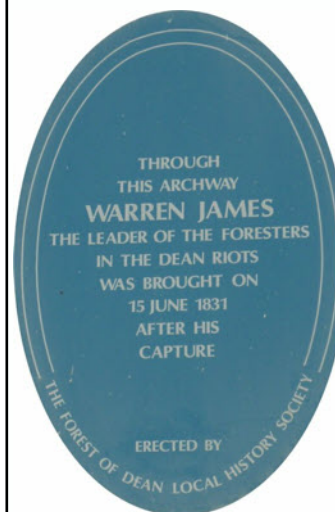
The upper panels of the window show the trees of the Forest, and it descends through the mine shaft to a depiction of miners, hewing and carrying hods, until the lower panels show them with their lights and candles emerging from the gloom. It is richly coloured, and is a window which compels the attention, revealing more the longer it is studied.

In his dedication and his address, the Bishop paid tribute the work of the artist, to past generations of freeminers who had worked in the Forest and worshipped at this church and also to the present members of the Freemaners Association whose efforts have resulted in this window, celebrating the ancient traditions of mining in the Forest.

It was an uplifting experience to see the church full, as it must have been in past times and to join in a traditional service of evensong, using the words that would have been familiar to congregations of miners back through the centuries.

Christine Martyn

PLAQUES & MONUMENTS



For centuries the Crown's main interest in the Forest had been to grow timber for the ships of the Royal Navy. To increase timber production they replanted 11,000 acres, and enclosed them with stone walls. The Foresters resented the building of these walls. The Foresters also believed that the Office of Woods also wished to abolish the free miners' ancient right to be the sole people entitled to register gales in the Forest. They also wished to regulate the Foresters' right to common their animals in the Forest and regulate the number of poor people who had settled illegally.

The Foresters became more and more dissatisfied with their state. In 1831 their discontent reached a climax, and they rioted. Under Warren James's leadership they systematically destroyed the enclosure walls over a period of several days.

There was practically no violence, but the military were brought in and the riots were quelled. Warren James and many others were arrested. Warren James was charged with assembling riotously with others. At his trial he was sentenced to death, but later the penalty was reduced to transportation for life to Van Diemen's Land in Australia.

Shortly after the riots the government appointed a Commission to carry out a full inquiry into the state of the Forest. It sat for four years and issued five reports. The Foresters considered that the proposals in these reports gave them nothing, so they were enraged. The government, hoping to get them to accept the Commission's proposals, decided in 1836 to get Warren James back to the Forest from Australia. They gave him a free pardon, but he did not return to the Forest. In the meantime, faced with the Foresters' hostility, the government modified their proposals which were set out in the Dean Forest Mines Act, 1838.

Warren James remained in Van Diemen's Land and died there in 1841. He was 49.



The Angel Hotel, Market Square, Coleford, where the Society's commemorative plaque to Warren James can be found (right of arch).