FOREST OF DEAN LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

news August 2015

LH Newsletter

ward 2015

Ruardean revisited! Read the review inside

Plus: VE Day in Lydney & Sabrina and Sabrina

Book Review



Growing up in the 1930's and 40's By Freda E. Margrett Freda Margrett is a long standing member of the History Society, who in her later years has found the ambition and drive to self publish a series of books. The latest in this series is entitled "The Old Rectory - Growing Up in the 1930's and 40's". As the title suggests the book is autobiographical and focuses largely on Freda's earlier years growing up in the family house, the Old Rectory at Welsh Bicknor.

This is a charming book providing a lot of useful social history, as well as giving a snapshot of family life in a rather isolated corner of Herefordshire. Freda's father moved the family to the area as he took work at the Lydbrook Cable Works. Daily life at the Old Rectory is recounted in some detail, with the trials of early school days featuring, as well as shopping trips to Ross on the local train.

Eventually the structural failings of the house forced the family to seek a new home (Fern Villa) in the Forest of Dean at Ruardean Woodside. The Second World War later intervened tragically in the life of the family, with two brothers killed, then Freda's father suddenly died six months later. Freda left school and took various jobs as a children's nanny, then spent three years in Canada, before eventually returning to work in various roles in the Forest area as a Community Nurse, Midwife and Health Visitor. The book is an enjoyable read and is recommended.

"The Old Rectory" by Freda E. Margrett ISBN 978-0-9564224-3-9 Price £15.99 The book can be obtained directly from Freda Margrett (email: freda_margrett@hotmail.co.uk)

WW1 Project - Update

The application for Heritage Lottery funding, which the Society is seeking from the HLF "First World War - Now & Then" initiative, has now been completed.

It is not too late to join the Project Team and contribute to this exciting project. If you would like to take part, send an email to Cecile at ww1project@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk

Since phase 1 of the project was completed, Cecile and Sue Gordon Smith have been involved with the BBC in helping to produce two short radio programmes (due for broadcast in the autumn), which can be heard now via the BBC iPlayer. You can hear the programmes here:

"Lydbrook, Forest of Dean. Making Cables to Communicate in Conflict" <u>http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02mr7y0</u>

"Flaxley Woods, Forest of Dean. Life of a Timber Jill" http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02spjnl



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AUGUST 2015

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Editors Notes

You will find two very interesting pieces provided by members in this edition:

John Thurston sent in a remarkable piece of social history, a copy of the 'Highfield Newsletter' dating from 9th May 1945. The newsletter tells how the Watts family and the citizens of Lydney celebrated Victory in Europe (VE) day. You get a real sense of the joy of the occasion of release from six years of war in Europe when you read it.

David Mullin attended Dr Mark Lewis's talk on the Severn Tsunami last year and was challenged by a chance comment to see if he could find a connection between Sabrina - the River Severn, and Sabrina the curvaceous actress and model best known for her work in the 1950's. You can judge for yourself if David managed to find a link by reading his article in the middle pages!

We have also received some correspondence about the May Newsletter from member Martin Fletcher: "The article on 'No Pit Props in the Forest of Dean' by Cecile Hunt I found most interesting, particularly, the mention of Lumber Gills training in the Forest of Dean. This not only happened in WWI but also of a more specialised and covert nature in WWII. When I was transferred as a Forestry Commission Forester from the Dean to Savernake in 1977 I met up with a lady in Marlborough called Betty Sandford. Her training in the old Forestry Training School in Parkend in, I think 1942, had been to help scour the countryside for a small tree called Alder Buckthorn. The wood of this tree, when made into charcoal, formed the basis for fuses to ignite explosives. Alder Buckthorn's unique property lay in the fact that the timing of the ignition could be very accurately determined by the length of fuse employed, as it burnt at a very precise rate. I thought this might be of interest; sadly Betty Sandford has long since died."

Thanks to John, David and Martin for their contributions. You too are welcome to send in articles and letters!

Keíth 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 Simon Moore

With the summer holidays upon us, we are looking forward to the start of our indoor programme of meetings in September, which gets off to a flying start with Chris Sullivan's talk on the Forest Eyres; 'Eyres and disgraces', on Saturday 5th September at 3.00 pm at the West Dean Centre in Bream. However, since our last meeting, in April, we been enjoying some very entertaining additional events, such as the brilliantly researched talk by Dr Nicholas Orme at Newland Church on the



Greyndour Family; our Society's coach trip to the Arnos Vale Cemetery and Bristol's floating harbour; the visit to Hopewell colliery; and the recent walk around the Village of Ruardean.

As I write this we are looking forward to the annual mystery coach tour by Cecile Hunt and Averil Kear, around some more of the 'honey-pots' of local history. My thanks to both of you for all the work you do on behalf of the society and especially the annual coach trip that I know you will have meticulously planned and researched.



You will have noticed, I hope, that we are now frequently making the local press with our various events and involvement in local heritage matters. This is thanks to our Publicity and Press Officer, John Powell, who many of you will know well, and to whom I express my thanks for doing such a sterling job; it is important that we continue to make people aware of the work that your society gets involved with and the good heritage based causes we support. If anyone has an interesting heritage project or object they would like to talk to John about; he is always on the lookout for a new lead and can be contacted either by email:

John Powell

publicity@forestofdeanlocalhistory.org.uk or by phone on (01594) 516916.

I have recently attended a talk by an organisation called 'Plantlife' as part of the HLF 'Foresters Forest' project; they are embarking on a survey of all the Veteran, Ancient and Notable trees in the Forest and they want volunteers to take on an area of Forest and record any trees of note, training will be provided, and the results will feed into a record of all the important trees standing in the Forest to help formulate a management plan for their protection, the ultimate aim being to set up a network of 'Guardians' for specific trees to ensure they are given the best chance of surviving. The introduction was a real eye-opener to the trees that are around us and could be the start of some really interesting research projects. Please let me know if you would like to take part in this project, and I will pass on your details to the team that are organising the work. The first training will start in September.

Finally, whilst on my mission to get people to get involved, again, I would like to take this opportunity to remind you that we are still looking for your help, the members of this society, to stand up and take an active role in unearthing, recording and preserving the history of 'The Forest of Dean'. We are particularly keen for new people to help on the committee to support the existing team; and to plan for succession. Don't be shy, step forward and get stuck in!



Vacancy!

The Society is looking for a new Secretary from October this year, as our current secretary, Cheryl Mayo, must step down after serving three years in the role. The position is not arduous and is a great way to get to know members, have a say in the running of your Society, and learn

what else is happening around the county with other history groups. If you would like to have a chat about what is involved, call Cheryl on 01594 510 533 (different from the number on the membership card), or our Chair, Simon Moore on 01594 840521. We are also always on the lookout for members to join the committee simply as committee members, so if you feel you would like to try this out, please talk to Simon about attending some meetings to see what goes on!

From the Membership Secretary (Cecile Hunt)

A warm welcome from the society to the following recently joined members:

Jean Prisk, Bream Stuart Lodge & Ca

Stuart Lodge & Caroline Prosser, Chepstow Christopher Wagstaff, Littledean Margaret Tipple, Coleford Alan & Beverley Maloney, Coleford Peter Foster, Westbury on Severn Wallace & Jenny Barnett, Lydney Helen & John Thophilus, Lydbrook David Edward, Coleford D & J Murray, Highnam Chris & Dorcas Forgan, Coleford Michael Roy Findlay, Coleford Mary Robins, Ross on Wye, Hfds Martin & Liz Spoor, Blakeney David Edwards, Coleford Harvey Knight, Coleford



Lightmoor Pool, Cinderford

Help Requested for Photography Project

The Society has recently been contacted by Steve Gaskin, who writes: "I'm a keen amateur photographer. I'm starting a project whereby I wish to create a portfolio of images concentrating on the lakes and ponds within the Forest of Dean and would like to add some background history as well as identifying any 'lesser known' waters to the ones I am familiar with. My list so far includes:

Soudley Ponds Mallards Pike Speech House Lake Lydney Harbour Steam Mills Lake Cannop Ponds Wenchford Woorgreens Lake Lydney Town Newnham

I was wondering whether any of your members would be happy to provide further information; they would of course receive due acknowledgement should I decide to publish my portfolio."

If you can help you can contact Steve via email (stevegaskin@me.com) or phone (07738628103)

A reminder that members can order in print issues of the New Regard from the online 'eshop', simply select the 'New Regard' tab at <u>http://store.forestofdeanhistory.org.uk/index.php</u>

Members can obtain a discount, on in print New Regards, by using the voucher code when prompted. Note that the voucher code will change from 'Ruspidge' to 'Bream' on 1st September 2015.

Mine Safety in the Dean - Recording the work of the Coal Authority

In 2009 the History Society came to an understanding with the Forestry Commission and the Coal Authority that enables the Society to record the work of the Coal Authority contractors in the Dean as they make safe the many remaining shafts and adits associated with the coal industry.



When shafts are in good condition, they are filled, topped with a safety grid, the remnant stone work is made good, and the site is then fenced. The photograph above shows a recent example of the work of the contractors near Parkend.

In cases where there is no stone shaft or the shaft is in poor condition, then the shaft will be filled, and in certain cases capped. The photograph below shows former FODLHS Chair Ron Beard at a filled air shaft, again near Parkend. The contractors staff who carry out the work are interested in mining history, and they always attempt to retain any material of interest that they find when carrying out their work. Note the remnant steelwork in the photograph.

Ron Beard has been recording the work of the Coal Authority since 2009, and the Society is in the process of creating an archive of the material which will be made available to mining history researchers.



Sabrina and Sabrina?? By David Mullin



lines and was promoted by the BBC as 'the bosomy blonde who didn't talk'. Her stage name was suggested either by Askey or Bill Ward, a BBC producer.

Askey said that the name was taken from a 1954, Oscar winning, Hollywood romantic comedy, released as *Sabrina* in the USA and *Sabrina Fair* in Britain, in which Audrey Hepburn plays Sabrina Fairchild, the leading female character. The film was adapted from a play by Samuel A Taylor. Taylor does not record from where he got the name. Bill Ward claimed that his inspiration was *Comus*, a

 Statue of Sabrina, goddess of the River Severn, at Quarry Park, Shrewsbury. Carved by Peter Hollins of Birmingham for the Earl of Bradford and presented to Shrewsbury in 1879.
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Meetings of the society can lead to the most obscure backwaters of history. On 8th November 2014, during his talk on the Severn flood of 30th January 1607 (or 20th January 1606, for those born before 1752), Dr Mark Lewis referred to Sabrina, the Latinised version of the Celtic name for the river Severn. This caused the member sitting on my left to wonder if there might be any connection between Sabrina the river and Sabrina the model and actress.

Norma Ann Sykes (stage name Sabrina) was born at Stockport (then Cheshire, now Greater Manchester) on 19th May 1936. She grew up in Liverpool, survived polio, and moved to London at the age of 16. Her career as a model, entertainer and actress was built on her 41 - 19 - 36 (inches) figure and (apparently self-proclaimed) 'complete lack of talent'. At the height of her celebrity she claimed 'vital statistics' of 42 $\frac{1}{2}$ - 18 -36 (inches). To prove it Sabrina was regularly photographed posing with a tape measure around the parts of her body of most media interest. Jane Wilkinson, a fellow model and friend, later said that Sabrina had a special tape measure, with short 'inches' on one side and long 'inches' on the other, for use on such occasions.

Norma Sykes became Sabrina in 1955, when she was chosen to play a 'dumb blonde' as a foil to comedian Arthur Askey (1900-1982) in the television series *Before Your Very Eyes*. She had no



Sabrina, (Norma Ann Sykes) pictured in 1957. Apparently showman Val Parnell took one look at the picture and said "She can't wear that - not in any programme of mine" Picture courtesy of nylon.net/sabrina

masque in honour of chastity, by John Milton (first performed at Ludlow Castle in 1634), in which the virtuous heroine is captured by the debauched necromancer Comus and freed by the nymph Sabrina. Ward, who knew that Norma Sykes had worked as a glamour model before breaking into television, may have had his tongue firmly in his cheek.

Milton's nymph had no connection with the river Severn, but he is thought to have borrowed the name from *The Faerie Queen*, a seemingly interminable (though unfinished) poem by Edmund Spencer (1552/3 - 1599). Book II, Canto X (published in 1590) includes a lengthy history of British Kings, from Brutus to Uther Pendagon (father of King Arthur). This is a retelling in poetry, with embellishments, of the (largely fictitious) *Historia Regum Britanni*-

ae (*History of the Kings of Britain*) by Geoffrey of Monmouth (1100/1101 - 1154/55). Among the kings is Locrine, who falls out of love with his queen Guendolene and takes as his mistress Lady Estrild, with whom he has a daughter, named Sabrina. Guendolene raises an army, defeats and imprisons Locrine (who then dies), kills Estrild and casts Sabrina into a river, which was henceforth known by her name.

So, if Ward is to be believed, we have a tenuous connection, via Edmund Spenser and John Milton, between the name of the river and the name of the actress.

Sabrina acted in a number of films and plays and recorded several songs between 1955 and 1970. She now lives in Hollywood, California, USA. THE FAERIE QVEENE.

Disposed into twelue books, Fashioning X I I. Morall vertues.



LONDON Printed for William Ponfonbie. 1590.

Sources: www.nylon.net/sabrina John Milton, *Comus* Edmund Spencer, *The Faerie*

Queen, Book II

Steve Sullivan, Bombshells -

Martin's Griffin, New York,

Glamour Girls of a Lifetime, (St

THE HIGHFIELD * NEWS-LETTER. A.J.Watts = editor. SPECIAL VICTORY EDITION.

Lydney - May 9th 1945

It is regretted that owing to lack of time no recent issues of the news-letter have been published. The celebration of VE day calls for a special edition and here it is.

The first definitive news of the capitulation of Germany was received in Lydney on Monday evening May 7th. The bare statement of fact seemed to disappoint some people who apparently considered that the radio set should explode. Monday night sundry minor explosions occurred, a few sirens sounded but appeared to have lost their 'pep'. Thursday morning, VE day, the hens laid four eggs in obvious anticipation that there would be an increase of rations on their next allotment. The streets and houses were well decorated with allied flags and arrangements made of floodlighting the British Legion and the Town hall. Highfield and the Diesel flew flags, and the garden was most patriotic with an assortment of red, white and blue flowers. The American Military Police were out early although the pubs were not open.

Dear Reader.

The Highfield company was small, although Cecil arrived in the small hours of the morning with one days leave, which got subsequently increased to two after a certain amount of telephone energy had been expended. During the afternoon we were visited by Barbara Beaumont, whose husband (for the information of continental members) is in the Sixth Airborne Division, Captain Bob Beaumont. Also Bobby arrived in time for tea, which she devoured with her customary gusto.

At 6'30 the Editor as acting unpaid taxi driver took the Edwards family to the Parish Church, which was full. The Editor's wife, Barbara, Cecil and John then went to Primrose Hill, called for the Reverend Lumbert who has been ill for some time and took him to his church. The little Primrose Hill Church was full and the vicar, although obviously not well enough to do so, gave a very sincere address, appealing not only for better homes but for better people to live in them. After this service there was a short service of thanksgiving in the Town hall, after which the City fathers addressed the crowd from an imposing platform constructed from an old lorry body borrowed from Watts (Factors). The structure was of ample strength and supported Uncle John and others without accident. The King's speech was then broadcast by loudspeakers while in the background was a horse and cart carrying a gallows from which was suspended an excellent effigy of Hitler in German prisoners uniform complete with party badge and Iron Cross.

The Town Band, Hitler in cart, City fathers, children, grandchildren, great grandchildren and Uncle Tom Cobley and all moved off and paraded through the town and up to Primrose Hill

where a large bonfire had been laid. Hitler was duly hoisted over the furnace prepared for him and finally his effigy succumbed to that fate that the heinous wickedness of his life so richly deserved. After the bonfire the Highfield party sat in the garden and listened to the radio and consumed some of the Editor's very small stock of the wine. Thus the long awaited VE day came to a close.



Until the next News-letter, Yours, Editor

Arthur Watts Photo courtesy of John Thurston

The Night of 5th April 1891 at Lydney Harbour By Cecile Hunt

Lydney harbour was built between 1810 and 1813 to transport iron and later coal from the forest, whilst the forest itself provided the oak for ships. The harbour was the last port on the Severn where sea-going boats could unload.

At one time Lydney Pill reached to within a couple of hundred yards of St. Mary's Church in Lydney. Until Stuart times, quite large ships were constructed at Lydney, including the 306-ton, 22-gun frigate *Forester* in 1657 and the 620-ton frigate *Princess* in 1660. However the silting up of Lydney Pill, ended the town's large-ship building era and since then, nearly a mile of new ground has been added to the shoreline - known as New Grounds. Following on from the closure of the Pill due to silt, small-scale boat building did continue and a new wharf had to be built at Lydney. Coal production, which started around 1750, transformed Lydney, which grew rapidly and the harbour remained very busy during the Industrial Revolution in the 19th century. Producing and transporting coal, stone, tinplate and timber and importing china clay and salt, made Lydney a small but thriving port.

The night of Sunday 5th April, 1891, was census night and all vessels moored in Lydney Docks had to comply by completing a census form with information respecting '*all the persons who slept or abode on board the vessel*' on the night of the census. These records give a lot of information not just on the people on board but on the vessels' themselves; its name, its official number and Sea Fishery Number (if any), port of place to which she belongs, her tonnage,



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BRYDGES P. HENNIKER, Begistrar Georgi

red by the Local Government Board, CHARLES T. RITCHIE, Preside

ancestrv.co.uk:1891

census:Lydney dock

description and whether steam or sailing, how employed and name of chief officer or master. Each vessel had to complete a 'Schedule for Vessels' - the one side followed the normal census layout and was completed by the occupants' of the vessel; the other side was completed by the Customs Officer, this side gives information on the vessel itself, see above, and if the any crew were ashore on the census night.

Schedules appeared to be delivered to the master of the vessel several days before they were due to be completed - the 'James', a 'Home Trader', schedule was delivered to its master at Lynmouth on April 3rd; 'Palace' a 'Coasting' vessel was given her schedule at Lydney on March 28th, whereas the Coasting Steamer - 'Walney' had hers issued at Garston Dock (Liverpool), no date given. Other ports/docks of issue include Burnham, Appledore, Dunball (Bridgwater), People on board the 'Steamer - Coasting' called 'Walney' included the Drummond family with a 9 month old baby. Also moored that night at Lydney Docks were 8 sailing ketches, Argo, Tilly, Swift, Infanta, George, Jonadab and Alfred & Arthur ; 4 sailing smacks, James, Dewi Wyn, Happy Go Lucky and Nelson; 2 sailing vessels, Providence and Palace and another Coasting Steamer (Barge) 'Pride of the Taw'.

It is sometimes surprising what can be found analysing census' - they are not always the basic form most of us are familiar with and can reveal all sorts of other details, data and information.

Meetings In Review



Averil Kear, Vice President of Newland Church, with Canon Professor Nicholas Orme

On Saturday 6th June, about 30 members and non-members took their pews in the Lady Chapel at Newland Church to hear Canon Professor Orme talk about the Greyndours of Newland, and in particular, Joan Greyndour, who founded and endowed the school in 1445-46. Joan was born Joan Rugge about 1400, and her mother was a Bittern with estates between Bristol and Bath. As an only child, Joan was highly eligible marriage material given the properties she would inherit. At age 19, she was married to Robert Greyndour. Robert died in 1443 and in the period between then and her marriage to Sir John Barre, Joan founded and endowed the grammar school at Newland. Sir John himself died in 1454 and Joan did not remarry. Joan was a very involved benefactress, with the school's initial Charter of 1446 reviewed by her in 1454 and again in 1465. FODLHS and Trustee of Friends of The Charter set out two levels of teaching: an elementary level costing 4p a term or 1/- a year, and, for the older boys, teach-

ing by a priest schoolmaster at a cost of 8p a term or 2/- a year. The Charter also detailed the daily timetable, which meant an 8 or 9 hour school day, and the holidays. Joan's will reveals details of bequests to servants and to a long list of organisations to who she was a 'sister', many of them religious houses. Most interesting of all are the very detailed instructions for her funeral. These describe various masses to be said but also allocations of money to the local yeomanry for new clothing to wear for the occasion and gifts of money to all the local clergy who attended (no doubt all!). Total outlay on Joan's funeral was well over £100, or about £200,000 in today's money!. Joan was laid to rest at Newland Church beside her first husband, Robert, whose tomb in the Greyndour chapel is the one which has the famous miners' brass on it. You can read the full text of Professor Orme's lecture at http://www.allsaintsnewland.btik.com/JoanGreyndourandher15thcenturyschool

'Oh let me lie in a quiet spot, with the green turf o'er my head, Far from the city's busy hum, the worldling's heavy tread; Where the free winds blow, and the branches wave, And the songbirds sweetly sing, '

Mary Carpenter 1807-1877, Bristol social reformer buried at Arnos Vale

On Saturday 20th June a party of this society's members and friends visited the Arnos Vale Cemetery in **Bristol**; the above quote is very apt as this is truly a beautiful place for a Victorian Bristolian to be buried.



Photo courtesy of Norman Hunt

We were given a guided tour by a member of the 'Friends of Arnos Vale'; and what a fascinating glimpse of this hidden treasure.

Started in 1837 as part of a 19th century movement to provide picturesque and spacious cemetery gardens, initially for the rich; as these were run as businesses and the plots costly; Arnos Vale was a response to the overcrowded inner city Churchyards, that could no longer cope with the increasing populations of industrial revolution Britain. It was laid out in an informal

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Some twenty members joined Chairman Simon Moore and Treasurer Cecile Hunt as they led an interesting and informative walk around Ruardean on Sunday 12th July. Simon first explained that Ruardean developed as a community primarily because of its position on high ground on a natural plateau, above the River Wye, being a good defensive position overlooking large parts of Herefordshire. The road passing through the village down towards the River Wye was a route known to and used by the Romans. The village started in a small way, with four men and three ploughing teams mentioned in the Domesday book. Moving along School Lane, the history of local schooling was explored. This led eventually to the building of a new village school in the early 1870's, the original buildings still being used today.

The party then moved along Caudle Lane until they stopped for Simon to show the village well (pictured). The availability of

water high on the hillside was an important factor when the settlement was founded. The next destination was Horlicks Barn. Ruardean is famous for its connection with the Horlicks malted milk drink. It was invented by two Ruardean men, William Horlick (1846-1936) and his brother James (1844-1921).

Having moved to stop opposite Horlick House, Cecile Hunt explained that the party was standing on the site of True Blue mine which only closed in the 1950s. Cecile then added a personal note by telling that her grandfather (George Worgan) and his wife, had lived in the house opposite, and that her mother remembered looking out over the mine from her bedroom window. Eventually the walkers arrived at the parish church of St John. Simon explained that much of the original church was restored in Victorian times, but that the tower and parts of the original nave were 12th century. Several members then opted to climb up the tower, at the top they were rewarded by fine views over Ruardean and the surrounding countryside. After pausing in the church to allow a tempestuous rain storm to pass, the walking party resumed their itinerary to the final destination, the ruins of Ruardyn castle.