

FOREST OF DEAN LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

news
August 2017

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The A48 - A New View

Press Gang Thwarted
at Blakeney!

History in Nature



August 2017

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Registered Charity
No: 1094700

Printed by
Inky Little Fingers

Editors Notes

I guess we all find ourselves rushing up and down the A48 towards Gloucester at some point. 'Familiarity breeds contempt' is the old familiar adage which probably applies when we make that trip. If you are not driving then there is some wonderful scenery to enjoy as you travel that road, but what else do we miss through that familiarity? Reading the August 2016 edition of the BALH 'Local History News', I was struck by Alan Crosby's description of his journey from Gloucester to Chepstow along the A48. I admire his ability to spot small but significant details and then convert his observations into a coherent and very readable article. Anyway, judge for yourself! Alan's article is reproduced on the pages of this edition.

My thanks go to Alan Crosby and the British Association for Local History for permission to reproduce the article. Visit their updated website www.balh.org.uk to see what they offer to the local historian.

Elsewhere in this edition John Powell brings us an unexpected tale of a naval press gang operating in Blakeney in 1778. However the press gang met their match in a violent and deadly encounter. I will say no more, read John's account for the denouement!

Cecile Hunt carries on her long running series of articles on local history by bringing us part 2 of 'History in Nature', focusing appropriately on trees.

Finally, it is with some sadness that I have to report the death of a former committee member, Freda Margrett. Freda was a member of this Society for over 40 years, and also served as a committee member for a period of time. You can read a tribute to Freda in the 'News' section.

Keith Walker

Stop Press!

There are just a few places still available on the 'self-drive' excursion to Norchard at Lydney on Saturday August 12th at 12:30pm.. Cecile Hunt will guide you round the remains of the iron working industry on the site, before you board a DFR train to enjoy a ride and a cream tea!

Ring Cecile on 01594 842164 if you are interested in this event.

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*



The summer is progressing at a rapid rate and it will soon be time to start our indoor meetings again; the first being particularly special as we visit the Masonic Hall in Newnham to receive a talk from John Gillo on 'Freemasonry in the Forest'. This is on Saturday 9th September starting at 3pm and should be a fascinating way to start our Autumn programme. Freemasonry has such an air of mystery about its ceremonies and rituals, its secrets and its membership; that I'm sure we will all want to attend this very special meeting, for which we thank the lodge for its kind invitation and hospitality. This is followed by a Wednesday evening talk, on September 20th at 7.30pm, on The Romans and their occupation of the lower Severn Valley, the talk will be given

by Dr Mark Lewis, at The Village Hall in Blakeney. October will bring us to our AGM on Saturday 7th.

The Annual General Meeting will mark the end of my three years in office as Chair. I really have enjoyed the opportunities that this time has given me and trust that you will give my successor, Mary Sullivan, as much support and encouragement as you have me. Now is a good time to encourage you to join the committee of your Society and find out what goes on behind the scenes, get more actively involved in the projects that we support and make a contribution. Members who feel they want to find out more are always welcome to come along and sit in a committee meeting.

The 'Forester's Forest' project, which we sit on the programme board for, is now getting underway with its five year programme of heritage projects that celebrates all that is good and important about the Forest of Dean; don't forget to visit their website at www.forestersforest.uk and find out about things that are happening and how you can get involved. There are some really interesting and important projects in this programme.

May I also encourage you to visit our website, or should I say, 'your' website; it is full of useful information, contacts and access to some of our resources, like the new Mining Glossary that Dave Tuffley has written, listing the terms and expressions specific to the Forest Mining industry. Our web services provider, ilateral, has recently completed work in transferring the Sites and Monuments database created by previous Society Chair Ron Beard, to our web site (www.forestofdeanhistory.org.uk). Take a look at the new 'Sites in the Forest' feature on the web site, you will find it under the 'Resources' tab. You too can add your own favourite places to the web site, simply complete the on-line form.

Finally, just a thought on the work that 'Friends of' groups do for specific buildings or sites. I am thinking particularly of Churches. I recently attended a celebration at Newland Church for the completed works on their tower; works organised, fundraised for, and administered by 'the Friends of the Cathedral of the Forest'. There really do an excellent job and the Church is in a lovely condition....well done. Many Churches operate a similar schemes and I would urge you to join some, get involved in helping to keep these ancient buildings open, accessible and in good repair; you don't have to be an active Christian to appreciate the special nature of these buildings, but if you don't want to see them close then you have to show that you care in some way...obviously regular attendance at a Church Service would be the answer, but if you are not so inclined, then show that you care by joining a Friends scheme.

Flaxley Abbey



Flaxley Abbey was originally a Cistercian monastery built in the vale of Castledale to commemorate the spot where, in 1143 in the reign of King Stephen, Mils Trevelyan, Earl of Hereford and Constable of St Ives Castle, had fallen while bearing, he had been shot by an arrow, it was said, at the instance of a political enemy, in the following years various gifts of land to the religious order built up a large estate, the monks ran an ironworks and a forge.

Forest House



Forest House is on Cledder Hill, Cleddard. It was built in about 1795, with walls two feet thick. Shortly after it was built, a sideways extension was made that doubled its size. In the 19th century it was known as 'Lump House'. It was always regarded as a more substantial house', it occupied by well to do people.

More

Highmeadow Farmhouse



Highmeadow farmhouse is about one mile along the road which branches from the Cleddard to Newland road and goes to the Redbrook road. The house backs onto the road. It is a grade 11* listed building, having some fine medieval windows, probably rose, and a massive, carved porch roof support.

'Sites in the Forest'
www.forestofdeanhistory.org.uk



Membership

Our Society keeps growing, and we pleased to offer a warm welcome to the following new members: David Jones, Michael Crofts, Melvyn and Linda Sterry, Richard and Deena Andrews.

This newsletter contains your membership renewal form, with fees due at the end of September. Last year's AGM voted to increase our annual fees by £2, which makes **single membership £12** and **two people at the same address £17**. If you have a standing order, please arrange to have it changed - it will save all of us a lot of work!

Also a reminder that we don't send out new cards until November, following the election of the new committee at the AGM. So don't panic if you don't receive a card immediately. Any questions at all, ring me on 01594 510533 or email membership@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk

Cheryl Mayo

Oral History Training Opportunity

The Foresters' Forest 'Voices from the Forest' project are offering places on a free oral history trying day on Friday 6th October (- including lunch and refreshments, times & venue to be confirmed).

The course will equip 12 participants to record oral histories and have practical guidance and demonstrations. It will include discussions on the strengths and weaknesses of oral history and the use of oral sources in historical research. Participants will have the opportunity to contribute to the ongoing study of occupational histories in the Forest after they have completed the training.

No background knowledge is necessary and all equipment is provided. LHS members are being given priority for this training opportunity, and places can be booked through Cheryl Mayo, LHS Membership Secretary at membership@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk

Members can order in print issues of the New Regard from the online 'eshop', simply select the 'New Regard' tab at store.forestofdeanhistory.org.uk

Members can obtain a discount, by using the voucher code when prompted.

Note that the voucher code will change to 'Mireystock' on 1st August 2017.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

**Saturday, August 12th - "New Mills & Cream Tea" - Self Drive Event
Led by Cecile Hunt.**

This is a pre-booked ticketed event taking place at Norchard, Lydney.

Still a few places available - ring Cecile on 01594 842164 for details.

**Saturday, September 9th - 3'00pm - Newnham Masonic Hall, GL14 1DA
John Gillo - "Freemasonry in the Forest"**

**Wednesday, September 30th - 7'30pm - Blakeney Village Hall, GL15 4DY
Dr. Mark Lewis - "Romans in the Lower Severn Valley"**

See our website for further details of how to get to Blakeney Village Hall.

**Saturday October 7th - 2'30pm - West Dean Centre, Bream, GL15 6JW
Annual General Meeting, followed by;
Geoff North - "VAD Hospitals"**



Ron Beard and Cherry Lewis Win Prestigious Awards

At the recent Local History Day held in London and organised by the British Association for Local History, two leading members of the Forest of Dean Local History Society received awards.

Ron Beard, former Chair of the History Society, received the prestigious 'BALH Award for Personal Achievement' for his work over many years in helping the History Society into the electronic age by producing the Miners Memorial CD, Photos for New Century CD, and the Laura

Morse Scrapbook (WW1) CD. In 2013, he wrote the content for a special edition of the New Regard featuring Cinderford and more recently has been working with the Coal Authority on an archive to mark mine capping activity.

Cherry Lewis received the 'The David Hay Memorial Article Award 2017', which is the top award for research and publication. Her article was judged the best of all the articles reviewed from over 100 journals received by the BALH. The winning work was 'David Mushet and his contribution to the "map that changed the world"', which was published in volume 30 of "The New Regard". The impetus for writing the article came when Cherry purchased Mushet's geological map at a West County auction, and then realised the importance of the map both locally and nationally.

Cherry has continued her research by recently publishing "The Enlightened Mr Parkinson" an important and well received book discussing the life and works of James Parkinson, after whom Parkinson's disease is named.

Freda Margrett

The Society is sorry to record the recent death, at the age of 90, of long standing member Freda Margrett.

Freda spent most of her formative years at the old Rectory of St Margaret's Church in Welsh Bicknor. She attended Goodrich School until she was thirteen, until the family moved to the Forest of Dean in 1940. After leaving school Freda spent time as a children's nanny in Cheltenham. In 1947 Freda went to Canada with her sister to stay with her uncle and his family for three years. On her return to England she trained as a nurse at Charing Cross Hospital in London, eventually returning to the Forest of Dean where she continued a long career in nursing.



When well into her ninth decade, Freda was inspired to write a series of books, which she self published. They included "The New Dawn – Prayerful Thoughts" which demonstrated the depth of her Christian faith. There were also three other books, "Welsh Bicknor – A Lost Parish", "The Old Rectory – Growing Up", and "Dads Diary – A Family at War", which collectively tell a powerful story of a lost way of life beside the River Wye at Welsh Bicknor.

Freda was a member of the History Society for well over 40 years. She was Treasurer between 1983 and 1988, and Membership Secretary between 1989 and 1994. She will be missed.

Press Gang Violently Thwarted at Blakeney by John Powell



A caricature of a Press-Gang in action. They had little success in the Forest where trowmen simply vanished into the woods.

Four hours before dawn on Friday, October 16, 1778. The village of Blakeney lies dormant, its residents in deep slumber. But all hell is about to break loose.

Anne Jenkins stirs in her bed and wakes husband Charles. Was there someone outside? Soon enough she could see and hear. The soft glow of lantern light shines through the window drapes and fists begin beating on the cottage door. Throwing on a cloak, Anne tumbles down stairs and opens the door. The identity of her visitors is swiftly and fearfully apparent. Their rough blue uniforms give them away. It's a Press-Gang.

This was a targeted raid. Charles Jenkins was, the *Gloucester Journal* reported, a man "who had been used to the water". It made him a prime capture for the Gloucester-based Gang who were out to do their bit to meet Britain's insatiable demand for sailors. But they had not reckoned on confronting Anne Jenkins. She immediately refused them admittance, slammed the door in their faces and raced for the stairs. On the way she snatched up a pick and a spit.

Let the *Journal* tell the story: "*She had scarcely taken her post there before six fellows broke into the house and the foremost presented himself at the foot of the stairs with a loaded pistol, swearing he would have her husband, and attempting to come up, the woman told him she would stick the pick thro' him if he came any further, the fellow persisted and as he came near the top of the stairs she stuck the pick into him. He fell and dropt his pistol upon the stairs, which she instantly swept down and caught, and gave to her husband who stood behind her at the top of the stairs, and bid him defend himself. The five other men seeing their comrade fall by the hands of a woman, were exasperated and attempted to rush up the stairs, but the woman still maintained her post and as the foremost advanced she struck the pick quite thro' his temples; this man's fate threw such a damp upon his comrades that they instantly retreated.*"

The newspaper went on to tell how the wounded man, who we now know was John Young, 'lingered' for three days before dying on the following Monday. Only a day later he was buried in the churchyard at Awre.

The immediate fate of Anne Jenkins is unclear but she next appears in January 1780 when it is reported she was committed to Gloucester's Castle gaol for the murder of John Young.

The report reads: "*Criminal as this woman may appear at present in the eye of the law, there is great reason to hope that when the fatal act shall be fully investigated it will be found to have proceeded not with malice aforethought but with a sudden irresistible impulse of conjugal affection... "She is now big with child and was committed with an infant in her arms who she supports in prison.*"

"It ought not to be omitted that the wretchedness of a gaol at this severe season is aggravated by her having offered to surrender herself for trial at the last Assize when she could not be arraigned on account of her not having observed the forms necessary on such occasions. Any donations will be received and applied to the woman's use by the Rev B Newton."

In the 'Calendar of the Criminal Prisoners in the Castle Gaol of Gloucestershire at the Trinity Sessions, July 11, 1780', Ann (Now without an 'e') Jenkins is listed as: "Brought in January 8, 1780, committed by B. Newton, Clerk, to answer to a Bill of Indictment presented to the Grand Inquest and found true against her for the wilful murder of one JohnYoung. - Out on bail."

That, it seems, was that. Our Forest girl had done her husband proud and there was, very obviously, little sympathy for the Press-Gang. Indeed, even within the walls of Gloucester Castle, which served as the

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THE FOREST OF DEAN LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

(Registered Charity No. 1094700)

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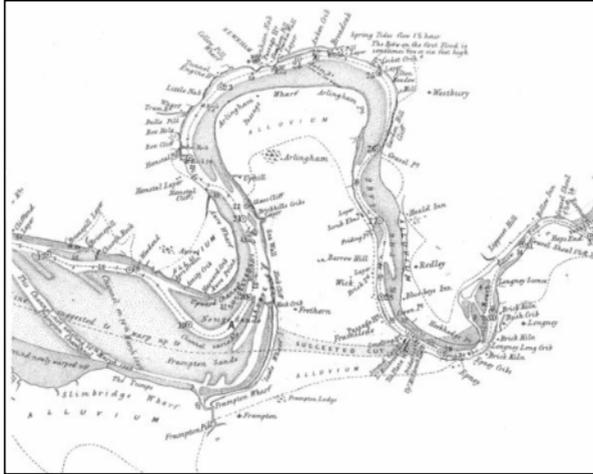
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- From Silver Spoon To Lead Balloon:
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- Revolutionary Reporter And Forest Of Dean MP (Price)
- 'Nobody Minds, The Public Pays': The National Dockyard At Beachley
- Standing 'The Gaff'
- The Talbot Ironworks, Lost And Found
- The Forest's Role To Finery Steelmaking In Britain, 1560 - 1700

Copies of New Regard 32 ordered now will be posted as soon as they are available from the printer in September.

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county gaol and a place of detention for those who had been pressed, freedom was possible, though at a price. One report refers to the keeper there, Richard Evans, possessing a magic palm...."rub it with silver in sufficient quantity and the 'street door to the gaol' opened before you..."

As a whole, the Forest of Dean and Severnside was a thorn in the side of the Press-Gangs. The men who sailed the fabled Severn trows claimed exemption from sea service on the grounds that they came under the protection of inland navigation. This state of affairs continued until 1798 when the Court of Exchequer overruled previous arrangements by deciding that "the passage of the River Severn between Gloucester and Bristol is open sea." A Press-Gang was immediately set loose on Severnside but the newly created sailors simply deserted their trows and fled to the Forest where they remained in hiding until the Gang sought other and more fruitful fields.

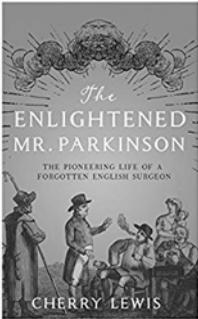
There was eventually a compromise. In 1806 the number of Severn trows was given as 98, ranging in capacity from 60 to 130 tons. Between them they employed 588 men of whom practically all enjoyed exemption from the Press. The Admiralty considered this number excessive and a contribution of one in every ten trowmen was suggested. There was, it was said, a thinly veiled threat that if this was not agreed Press-Gangs would be set to work to take all they could get. The figure was reluctantly agreed by members of the Association of Severn Traders.

Press-gangs continued to operate and provided men for both the navy and the army. The practice was ended following the defeat of Napoleon in 1814.



A typical upriver Severn trow at Westgate Bridge, Gloucester. The gaol where Anne Jenkins was detained is in the background.

Book Review by Keith Walker



The Society's own Cherry Lewis has written a very engaging study of a polymath of the enlightenment, a man who had three over-riding passions, medicine, politics, and fossils. Having been apprenticed to his father, James Parkinson (1755 – 1824) pursued a career as an apothecary, but later also gained qualification as a surgeon, so his role in society then would probably equate today to that of a GP. During his career he also wrote many medical books.

Parkinson was a political radical to his potential personal cost. At one point he was interrogated about a plot to kill King George III. He was also an author of anti-government pamphlets. Perhaps his primary passion was the collection and study of fossils, triggered, as he said, "from the moment of viewing the splendid collection of John Hunter, remains of animals became the subject of my anxious investigations".

He later assembled a vast collection of fossils, and went on to write the three volumes of "Organic Remains of a Former World", which contained descriptions of over 700 fossils. It was for his work on fossils that the Royal College of Surgeons made him a recipient of their Gold Award in 1822. However his lasting fame comes through his work, "An Essay on the Shaking Palsy", which he wrote in 1817 and is regarded as a medical classic. Parkinson was the first to accurately observe, identify, and describe the condition as a clinical entity, which today we know as 'Parkinson's disease'.

Cherry's book is very highly recommended.

The Enlightened Mr Parkinson – The Pioneering Life of a Forgotten English Surgeon
304 pages, published by Icon Books, Available from Amazon in hardcover or as an ebook.

History In Nature (Part 2) by Cecile Hunt



Beech trees in the Forest of Dean

Most ancient woods have been managed for most of their history by coppicing. Today, coppicing on an industrial scale, to feed the iron works and limestone kilns, has largely died out, although it increasingly continues in wildlife reserves and some Forestry Commission woodlands.

Signs of former coppicing are easy to find within the Forest of Dean: the multi-stemmed trees grown from coppice stools and the rich variety of trees and shrubs that were supported by the coppice system are abundant. Good coppicing trees are: ash, hazel, oak, sweet chestnut and lime.

Sweet chestnut was introduced by the Romans from Albania: Henry II gave a tithe of chestnuts to the

monks of Flaxley Abbey - the wood is still in existence and looked after by the Friends of Chestnut wood.

In 1783 Mr Colchester reported to the Government that in the Forest were 90,382 oak and 17,982 beech trees. He added that the greater part of the fine timber which the forest had been, at one time, so remarkable for, had been cut down .. "where the noblest trees had grown was now only a barren waste and heath" - the aftermath of Sir John Winters timber clearance a century before. (To build a 74 gun ship in Nelson's navy took 2,000 oak trees).

In 1885 it was estimated there were over 3000 holly trees in the famous Speech House Holly Woods which stretched from Speech House Colliery, now Beechenhurst picnic site, to Foxes Bridge colliery off Valley Road, Cinderford. They were managed by the crown for harvesting. In 1881 some of the hollies were judged to be over 500 years old.

Holly stealing was rife: Morgan, a collier from Two Bridges in December 1884 pleaded guilty to stealing holly, property of the Crown at Stapledge; he was fined 5s and 7 days hard labour. Crown keepers spoke of the damage done by people cutting/stealing holly every Christmas season - stolen mainly to sell. Holly trees which abound in the Speech House area are the remnants of those Holly Woods.

Extensive areas of oak (*Quercus robur*) were planted in the late 19th century by the predecessors of the Forestry Commission who came into being in 1919. Over the centuries the Forest of Dean was probably the most wooded of the large Forests; with some pasture in the form of healthy greens, the majority of these greens have disappeared since the management of the Forest changed in 1919.

Nelson reported in 1803 the forest was in a deplorable state with the need to plant acres of acorns. Because of the Nelson report waste land was planted with acorns; there are many examples of waste land around the Forest having been seeded with acorns; evenly spaced trees of all the same age; keep a look out when out and about - a good example is an area on St Whites Hill, Cinderford opposite Buckshaft Road.

Many disused withy beds are found around the Forest - willow used for basket weaving (including putchers used for fishing on the River Severn) goes back hundreds of years. Withy beds don't grow near salty water; to find them look near fresh water. If you find an area of willows you may have found an old withy bed! There is a small withy wood near the village of Awre; also if travelling along the A48 between Aylburton and Alvington the road cuts through an old withy bed in the dip after the turning for Sandford Terrace.

To be continued.....

The Frowen & Kearsley Families *by David Jones*



David Jones, pictured with his sons Robert and Rhys

David Jones is a new Society member, a Welshman, who lives in the seaside town of Porthcawl, Glamorgan. He is a retired Police Officer, Publican & Legal Services Proprietor, who writes here about the connection between his family and the Forest of Dean.

According to the 1881 Census there were 133 Frowen's and 161 Kearsley's in Britain at the time. The vast majority of both these family names were concentrated in the Forest of Dean. My Great, Great Grandparents were Thomas Frowen and Elizabeth Kearsley who were married at Newlands Church on 14th

August 1870. They went on to have thirteen children, eleven of which were born in Coleway Lane End and the last two were born in Palmer's Flat. The 1881 Census reveals that the families lived next door to each other. Their respective father's were Henry Frowen (Coal Miner) and James Kearsley (Miller & later a Stone Cutter) both of whom were Forest men. I have traced back the Frowen line as far as Charles Frowen, born in Forest of Dean 1735 and William Kearsley, born in Gloucestershire in 1545.

Thomas and Elizabeth Frowen moved to Wales to seek work in the Coal Mines around 1896 and settled in Ystrad Mynach, Glamorgan. All of the children went with them. After a few years, in about 1898, they relocated to Llanharan, Glamorgan where Thomas Frowen helped to sink the new pit. Many of his sons found work at this new pit and settled in the area. Their daughter Lucy Frowen was my Great Grandmother and she married a Welshman named Eddie George, yet another Coal Miner who had also moved to Llanharan to work at the new mine. My Grandmother, Gladys George was born here at 9 Chapel Row. After a few years, Thomas and Elizabeth returned to Ystrad Mynach and settled in Church Street. Most of their children had married local people and stayed in the Llanharan area. Both Thomas and Elizabeth died in 1931 and are buried in the Churchyard at Ystrad Mynach.

Their children have long gone too but they made their marks in life. Charles Emmanuel Frowen, South Wales Borderers, won a bravery medal during WW1, Ernest Henry Frowen (Air Raid warden) is recorded on the Coventry Civilian War dead scrolls due to the bombing of Clay Lane (1940) during WW2. One of the Grandson's, John Frowen, played football for Cardiff City in the old First Division in the 1950's and early 1960's. He later played with distinction for Bristol Rovers.

Boston House School

Our Enquiries Officer, Averil Kear, is puzzling over a recent question about Boston House School. Do you know something of this story? If you do, please contact Averil at enquiriesofficer@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk

This school for girls, originally at Chiswick, moved to Eastbourne in the 1890s (Carlisle Road) and later expanded to larger premises, where it remained until June 1940. Upon the fall of France in that year the school was evacuated, never to return. We had no idea where it had gone but recently came across two notices in the Eastbourne Gazette. One (19 June 1940) that was inserted by the then headmistress, Miss Oliver, states that the school would be "Evacuating to Littledean, near Cinderford, Glos and that parents wishing for their daughters' safety in the heart of the country can be assured that they will be under the personal care of Miss Oliver. School travels on Friday June 21st. Others arranged for next week." A further notice on 17 July is more specific. "Boston House Meads - Has now moved to a large house in good grounds in a safe position. Boarders can be received immediately. For terms apply: Miss Oliver, Dean Hall, Littledean, Glos"

We would love to find out how long it stayed at Dean Hall. Can we find out where it went? Perhaps to a large house or was there a merger with an existing school?

Meetings In Review *with John Powell and Keith Walker*



Of all the Forest villages, Parkend might lay claim to being the one most changed. Few of its modern-day visitors — buzzing around on bikes, chatting and eating in its taverns, or quietly exploring its nature reserve — could even begin to imagine what it was like in a previous life.

Save for the Dean Forest Railway, there are very few obvious clues of its grim and grimy past dominated by furnaces and fire and an unbelievable network of underground ‘roads’. To find out more you should, of

course, keep up your membership of the Forest of Dean Local History Society, then persuade its former chairman, Ron Beard, to plot out another extraordinary exploration of the paths of Parkend. There are plenty of ‘em!

Ron’s speciality and expertise are the mines of the Forest and, forgive the pun, he is a mine of information on the underground movements of our forefathers. Anticipating that his extensive knowledge would provide a glorious opportunity to learn more about what went on, an incredible sixty-four members turned up on a beautiful Sunday afternoon to take part in a gentle early May stroll through the woods, along the way visiting perhaps a dozen former pit sites. Nowadays they are all capped, and are little more than scratches on the surface. But, importantly, each one had a story to tell.

Ron, assisted by his wife, Pat, produced the evidence in the form of maps showing all the underground workings... workings clearly extending to many more miles underground than our modern-day roads network on the surface. For sure, it proved our granchers were busy blokes!



The walk started at Mason’s Tump, a little pit close to the centre of the village, and ended up at Brockallditches — a destination which reminded your reviewer of a true story of a Forester on holiday in Gibraltar. Waiting patiently in a queue to board a bus, he became aware that the driver, who was also taking the fares, was very obviously from our neck of the woods. When his turn came he asked for “a single to Brockallditches, please.” Back came the reply: “Sorry, I yunt stopping ‘till I get to Moseley Green.!” **J.P.**



According to local legend Jackie Kent, involved in a throwing competition with the Devil, launched a huge boulder from Tidenham Chase across the Severn and as far as Thornbury. Had he been among the party of gardeners and historians leaving Cinderford on Saturday, June 10, he might well have considered attempting to repeat the feat, this time launching his Forest boulder from Sawney’s Lookout towards the Cotswold heights and the magical and wondrous valley of Woodchester.

As the crow flies this very special place is naggingly near. But to retrieve Jackie’s stone — we have assumed he has thrown it — we had to sit back and enjoy the hour-long coach journey through Gloucester’s grinding traffic while watching the hue of the houses slide from Forest grey to Cotswold gold (we will argue later which is best!)

The destination was Woodchester Park and the fabled Woodchester Park Mansion, the Victorian gothic building on which the workforce downed tools in 1861. It was in that year William Leigh, a previously

wealthy ship owner, ran out of cash. Overnight, work on his grand but uncompleted home ended. It was never to start again.

This property is in a truly stunning setting, a glorious valley touched by the skills of 'Capability' Brown and Humphry Repton and enjoying a unique micro-climate in its deeply wooded valley setting resounding with bird song and reflected in delightful lakes.

After roaming the grounds our party split into two for a fascinating and informative tour which was a credit to the unpaid volunteers who support the Woodchester Mansion Trust. The park itself is owned by The National Trust and is a gem in its own right.

There was much to see and admire and the only shortcoming was that we could perhaps have extended our stay by another hour. So, perhaps another day? This was a joint venture between members of Bream Gardening Society and ourselves and our thanks go to Diane Standing, who has a foot in both camps, for her excellent organisation. Thanks also to our Cheryl Mayo, the society's membership secretary, who guided the day and achieved the distinction of being the only member of our party to walk from the car park to the mansion and back, a round trip of a couple of miles. The mini-bus was bumpy but better!

J.P.



On a beautiful summer Sunday in early July, fifteen members gathered at Castleman Depot at Parkend, to join History Society Vice President and Verderer, Ian Standing, in a pleasant, informative walk around Churchill Enclosure.

Ian provided some context before the walkers set off by outlining the history of management of the Forest. He then invited the assembled throng to differentiate between two adjacent oak trees. This was the start of an afternoon of education, as Ian, together with former Forestry worker Pete Ralph, demonstrated their depth of knowledge of all things tree and Forest. It turned out that one of the oaks was a pendunculate (common) oak, and the other was a sessile oak, both native to the UK. An adjacent poplar tree prompted Pete Ralph to 'enlighten' the party that these trees were specifically grown in the Dean to be converted into Englands Glory matches at Morelands factory in Gloucester. Turning onto

the Lime Avenue, a mysterious upturned stone marked 'GR' was observed adjacent to one of the innumerable lime trees. Tree rings then became the topic of the conversation. There are fewer rings higher up a tree trunk, and to measure the age of a tree via rings, this must be done at the base of a tree. Obvious when it is explained, but just one more interesting thing learnt during the walk!

Stands of Douglas Fir and Norway Spruce were passed by, then the first of a number of diseased trees was studied, red band needle blight is regrettably attacking the Corsican pines. At Redwood Grove, a group of Coastal Redwood trees provided the next stopping point. Ian explained that they are long lived trees that reach enormous sizes in America. The local examples were pretty impressive as well! Next the Charles II Oak, an ancient tree, came into view. Somewhat storm damaged but still surviving, we learnt that this old tree probably dates from the 17th century. Continuing past Churchill Lodge, the party passed through a stand of oak, with beech underwood; described by Ian as a sylvan setting beloved of Victorian travel writers. The sad site of a dead oak tree provoked more discussion about tree disease. Ian related how both slow oak decline and sudden oak decline are very serious threats to the oak population of the Dean. As yet very little is known about these diseases, although apparently fallen oaks with 'decline' symptoms were known to have small root systems, and this might provide a clue for those researching the issue.

The walk finished opposite Parkend Primary School where Ian invited the walkers to use their new found knowledge to identify a large oak tree. After some discussion, it was declared to be a hybrid of common and sessile oak!

K.W.

The A48 by Alan Crosby

Driving along the A48 from Gloucester to Chepstow in August, I was intrigued by the character of a road which, before the building of the M50/A449 past Ross on Wye, and the M5/M4/M48 and the Severn bridges, was one of the great arteries of the kingdom. Like other such routes – the A38 from Worcester to Gloucester, or what used to be the A41 from Banbury to Warwick are good examples – it retains many features associated with the pioneering age of mass motoring in the late '30s and especially the 1950s and early '60s.

The alignment is generally well below the standards expected in more recent times. When motor traffic began to increase, local authorities and central government were rarely enthusiastic about building on new alignments. So on the A48, as elsewhere, widening was often implemented using the existing ancient alignment, with long bends and sharp curves, and little or no attempt to ease gradients. In the '50s that didn't matter all that much, but today, when cars are so much more numerous, and faster, it means a 50mph limit for most of the route.

The tell-tale signs of 1950s' road design can be seen in other ways. For considerable distances the carriageway is wide, but with only one lane in each direction ... faint lines and fading paint in the tarmac reveal the former existence of three lanes, that standard device of the post-war period which allowed overtaking in either direction in the central lane. Goodness, I remember some alarming near misses from my childhood, because of that! The three-lane sections have now been removed almost everywhere (many of us lament that they could easily have been adapted for uni-directional overtaking but unfortunately rarely were).

Another very obvious feature of these roads is the very short stretches of dual carriageway on the crest of hills – the A48 has an exceptional number of these. Driving from the A40 outside Gloucester to Chepstow on a Saturday morning, I did not encounter a single lorry in 28 miles, but sixty years ago the road was crowded with them, heading to or from the industrial areas of South Wales and the Midlands. Overtaking was extremely difficult, so the odd quarter mile stretches of dual carriageway on hilltops meant that at least a few cars might pass wagons slowed to a crawl. This time I used them to pass the occasional learner driver or holiday motorist, and in one instance what sixty years ago might have been a called a charabanc, but there was very little traffic.

Stretches of the road have the slightly forlorn appearance which many such routes share. In days of yore they were arteries of trade and commerce, reflected in the remarkable number of pubs, hotels and garages, service stations and car repair places which is a feature of the old trunk road network. Many of these, of course, have closed and are empty and abandoned. The loss of the passing trade, the greater reliability of cars, larger fuel tanks and better fuel consumption mean that the business is no longer there.

Lydney, metropolis of the west bank of the Severn, is bypassed by a modern road, the only major diversion away from the old route. But a succession of other places – Minsterworth, Westbury on Severn, Blakeney, Alvington, and especially Newnham - still have many reminders of the prosperity and business which an arterial road and a thriving commercial waterway, the River Severn, once brought. Until 1935 Newnham and Westbury were small urban districts, and the former – with its unexpected impressive and elegant three-storey Georgian buildings, spacious green-cum-market place, imposing clock tower and shops – still has a pronounced urban quality, though the Victoria Hotel at the top of the High Street is boarded up. And along the road there are glimpses, and sometimes splendid views, of the majestic brown waters of the Severn, rolling away to the Bristol Channel. To the north-west are the densely wooded fringes of the Forest of Dean. A lovely road if you aren't in a hurry, and every mile displays its history.

