

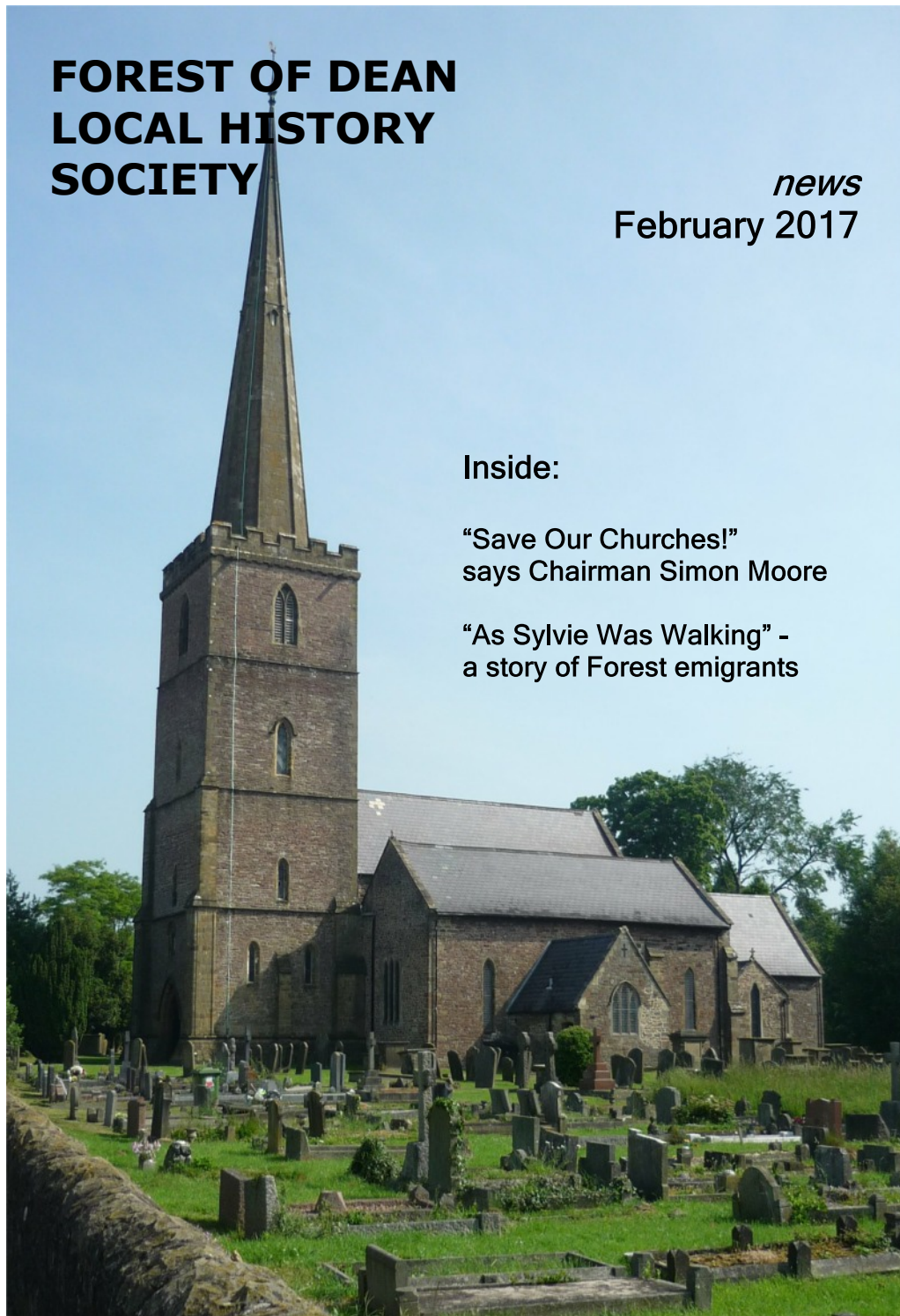
FOREST OF DEAN LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

news
February 2017

Inside:

**"Save Our Churches!"
says Chairman Simon Moore**

**"As Sylvie Was Walking" -
a story of Forest emigrants**



Book Review by Keith Walker

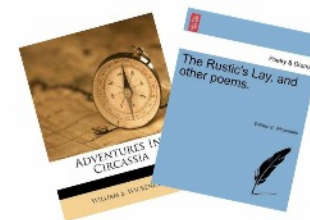
David Adams of the Yorkley A&E team has engendered a renewed focus on a significant forgotten local author of the 19th century. His new book "Severnside to Circassia" tells the remarkable story of the Reverend William Wickenden of Etloe.

Over his lifetime William Wickenden published over twenty books, with the majority being fiction, but also including autobiographical and poetic volumes. He is largely unknown now, but was quite successful in the 19th century. Wickenden was born in 1796 and spent his formative years on the family farm in Etloe. His father taught him basic reading and writing, and he later received private tuition from William Gardiner, a schoolmaster and novelist who lived in Lydney. He was quite a young man when in 1817 he published his volume "The Rustic's Lay and other poems".

The book was dedicated to Dr Edward Jenner, the pioneer of smallpox vaccination. Jenner has become aware of Wickenden's work, and encouraged him to attend university. Although he came from a poor background and lacked formal education, he managed to gain entry in 1821 to St John's College, Cambridge as a sizar (a poor student who paid lower fees and acted as a servant to other students). He graduated with a lower degree from Cambridge in 1826, thus decided to enter the clergy to earn a living. He served as a curate firstly at Mudford in Somerset, then latterly at Little Compton, then Lassington. Whilst at Mudford he became embroiled in controversy, when he formed "an ill judged attachment" to a young lady, who he made his housekeeper. In contention with the social mores of the time he proposed to marry her, but under threat of losing his living he was forced to abandon those plans. Around the same time he 'lost his voice', a serious issue for a clergyman, which ultimately forced him from his profession.

These circumstances, together with intermittent ill health, set the pattern for the remainder of his life. He obtained financial help through donations by sponsors. The Cholmondeley Trust for distressed clergymen, and later the Charterhouse Trust, provided accommodation for a while, but "for the rest of his life William Wickenden was to live sometimes in London and sometimes in Gloucestershire" whilst he pursued a literary career, albeit plagued by illness and poverty.

He self published much of his work, aided by subscriptions from his literary followers. He was most well known for a series of adventure stories and historical romances, which were often set abroad in places which it is thought Wickenden could not have possibly visited. It seems that Wickenden may have had elements of Walter Mitty about him, as David Adams writes; "The more the impoverished, ill, lonely writer suffered and was confined, the more he wanted to create alternative romantic heroes, derring do in exotic lands, marvels and the triumphs of love – and allow himself to escape to a world that had its roots in the Forest of Dean and in his boyhood experiences therein."

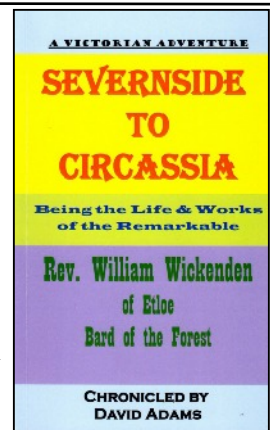


*Certain of William Wickenden's
books are available to buy on the
internet as print to order versions*

David Adams has produced a really well researched 84 page book that is not only autobiographical, but also introduces us to Wickenden's published canon, including extracts from his novels and poetry books. This book, small in physical size but high in literary stature, is very highly recommended.

"Severnside to Circassia – Being the Life & Works of the Remarkable Rev. William Wickenden of Etloe" – Chronicled by David Adams.
ISBN 9780957208759

Priced at £6.00 the book is available at the Dean Heritage Centre, Taurus Crafts and Yorkley Post Office. In case of difficulty obtaining the book, please email : yorklev.ae@gmail.com



Editor:

Keith Walker
51 Lancaster Drive
Lydney
GL15 5SJ
01594 843310
NewsletterEditor@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk

Chair:

Simon Moore
01594 840521
Chair@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk

Treasurer:

Cecile Hunt
01594 842164
Treasurer@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk

Secretary:

Chris Sullivan
01594 860197
Secretary@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk

Website:

forestofdeanhistory.org.uk

Registered Charity
No: 1094700

Printed by
Hanley Court Printers

Editors Notes

The centre pages of this edition carry an article by Ian Wright about Ann Aston (nee Howell) and her family, who emigrated to Australia in the 1850's. As you will see in Ian's article, Ann has a claim to fame through her contribution of a folk song to the Penguin Book of English folk song. In the next edition Ian Wright will expand the story to tell us about Ann's daughter Tilly, who is widely known in Australia as a disability rights campaigner. Whilst seeking suitable illustrations for the article, I made contact with Chris O'Sullivan in Australia, who turned out to be related to Ann Aston through Ann's sister, Susan. Chris then very kindly provided information and corrections to earlier drafts of Ian's article. Chris also provided Ian with a copy of Tilly's memoirs and information from the family diary journals. Both Ian and I would like to express our thanks to Chris O'Sullivan for all his help in producing the story of the Aston family for this newsletter.

You will also see in this edition an article by Nicola Wynn of the Dean Heritage Centre. Nicola needs our help in seeking to put in place recording agreements with or on behalf of local people who took part in oral history recordings made in the 1980's and 1990's. The article contains a list of the people or their close relatives that Nicola would like to make contact with. Please take a look and if you have any information about the people listed, Nicola would like to hear from you!

Last, but certainly not least, you have the chance to be involved in an historic occasion on Wednesday February 15th, when a new Verderer will be elected in the magnificent surroundings of Gloucester Cathedral. I was present at the last election of a Verderer in the Cathedral in 2011, when our Vice President Ian Standing was elected. There was an electric atmosphere as the vote was taken (by a show of hands!), and whilst the candidates were giving their speeches to the electorate. I am sure that this election will be just as exciting!

If you are a freeholder of the County of Gloucestershire (excepting freeholders of the cities of Gloucester & Bristol), then you are entitled to attend and vote. The election starts at 11am on 15th February. If you are planning to go along, I suggest you get there early, as the cathedral is likely to be full by 11am!

Your vote gives you the opportunity to support the candidate who best represents your own views about how to protect the 'Vert and Verd of the Forest.'

Keith Walker

Short pieces of news, views, and opinions for the Newsletter are always very welcome. Every effort will be made to reproduce articles as presented but the Editor reserves the right to edit as necessary. The Editor will assume that all necessary authorisation for attachments, photographs etc has been obtained and the FODLHS will not be held liable in the case of a subsequent query.

News From The Chair with Simon Moore

May I take this opportunity to wish you all a very happy new year and hope that you had a good break over the Christmas period. I look forward to meeting up with as many of you as possible at our forthcoming meetings.

Over Christmas I attended a number of Church services, nothing better than a few carols to get you in the Christmas spirit!...and you might have been forgiven for thinking that the 'Church' was still alive and buzzing, lots of people turning up and joining in...which was great to see....however, the old bumper sticker motto.... 'Church is for life and not just for Christmas' has never been so apt!...



Last week I visited our storeroom in Lydney and started reading through the back copies of the St John's Church Magazines that we rescued from the building before it finally closed its doors....we seem to have fairly comprehensive records from about 1972 to the end of the 1980's.....several things struck me:

Firstly what a great period of change that seems to have been, from a very staid and old fashioned Church in the early 1970's with daily services, 3-4 on Sunday, plus mission chapels at St Luke's, Milkwall and The Good Shepherd, Broadwell.....but the writing seems already to have been on the wall, it was unsustainable; rapidly rising costs, dwindling congregations and fewer clergy coming forward meant combining parishes and closures of churches.....a now familiar tale. The second thing that struck me is that very little has changed, the Church was already burdened by its buildings, short of cash to pay for both its mission and its day-to-day running costs and still is...talks of having to close churches, reduce services, find new and innovative uses for the old church buildings.....and an acceptance that they were no longer fit for their purpose all being voiced....and this is 1976....what has happened over the last 40 years? Not very much it would seem, just a very sad steady decline. The other files that we retrieved show both expensive and not entirely successful or long lived repairs being carried out to keep the old ship afloat, and hugely ambitious schemes for conversion, sub-division and multi layered community use for the building, all really impressive...but falling by the way side for lack of public and civil support and an acceptance that without public ownership and funding these goals are just very difficult to achieve.

Let's not stand by and let this happen to the other Forest Churches, even if you are not religious, you cannot help feel a sense of loss when a fabulous building like St Johns is under threat....OK it is far too big, far too expensive to maintain, but it is still an awesome building and historically significant to its setting. So my plea to you all this year to visit our Churches, donate to help maintain them, volunteer to help maintain them....dare I even suggest that you attend a service or two!cos if you don't; more will have to close and that would be great shame.

For those of you who volunteered to help sort and catalogue a collection of Ordinance Survey maps that we have acquired, Averil and Cecile will be contacting you shortly to get started with the job of getting them into a useful order and condition.

The congregation of St John's have been successful in getting lottery funding to collate the memories, photographs and other information about the life of the old Church for an exhibition and book, which we will be helping to co-ordinate, so again, if anybody has any information, would like to help with the project or would like to recount their memories as part of an oral history, let me know and I can put you in contact with the team. Meanwhile the HLF project 'Foresters Forest' has successfully submitted it's round two application and we await the outcome...fingers crossed.

Finally I would like to remind you all that we are still looking for new committee members and are particularly looking for somebody with an interest in IT to help run the website.



MEMBERSHIP

It's been a busy couple of months for renewals and we have also had several people join us since the end of the last membership year.

The Society is pleased to offer a warm welcome to the following new members: Michael Sargent, David Wright and Caroline Harmer, Stephen Ward, Jay and Laura Waller, Edwina Bell and Alis Hawkins, Lin and Oliver Phelps, Matt Phelps and Kris Hustwitt, Peter Monk, Mr and Mrs F Amos-Hall, Bill Otto, Kirsten Westgate, Maria Edey. We hope you very much enjoy the benefits the Society brings.

Our member numbers have fallen slightly with the loss of some memberships from last year. However, we still have over 300 individual members which is very healthy.

We are always looking for members to join the Society's committee, so if you would like to help out in the running of your Society, please talk to one of our committee members - telephone numbers are on the membership card or approach us at a meeting. You don't have to be an old hand to be on the committee, so new members, please don't be shy!

Please note that if you are receiving this newsletter, it means you have renewed! Thank you for your ongoing support.

Cheryl Mayo - Membership Secretary

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 'Etloe' on 1st February 2016.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Saturday, February 11th - 3:00pm - West Dean Centre, High Street, Bream, GL15 6JW

Averil Kear - "The Rise of Education in the Forest of Dean"

Society Vice President Averil Kear makes a welcome return to speak about "The Rise of Education in the Forest of Dean"

Saturday, March 11th - 3:00pm - West Dean Centre, High Street, Bream, GL15 6JW

John Putley - "As Sure As God's in Gloucestershire" Pilgrims and Their Destinations

This presentation by John Putley of Gloucestershire Archives investigates all aspects of medieval pilgrimage and looks at the fabled pilgrim destinations of Gloucestershire.

Friday, March 24th - 7:30pm - Blakeney Village Hall, off High St, Blakeney GL15 4DY

Peter Strong - "The Murder of Kymin Bet - A Monmouth Murder of 1828"

A talk about the murder of Kymin Bet in Monmouth in 1828 and what it reveals about policing, legal procedures, and newspaper reporting at the time. Not for the faint hearted!

See the website for details of how to reach Blakeney Village Hall.

Saturday, April 8th - 3:00pm - West Dean Centre, High Street, Bream, GL15 6JW

Roger Deeks - "Voices from the Forest"

We are at a time when those who remember the forest, a changing forest, have important stories to tell. It is vitally important to collect those stories in the form that they are expressed, as oral accounts based on individual, unique recollections. This Foresters' Forest project will collect some of the oral histories of Foresters, and those who came and went from the Forest, to add to our collective knowledge of our heritage. The memories of participants will be recorded, capturing the essence of what it was like to live and work in the forest settlements and industries through the last century.



Gloucestershire Local History Association - History Day

The theme of the 2017 Local History Day will be 'Gardens for Food, Fun and Flowers'.

It will be held at Churchdown Community Centre from 10.30am to 4.00pm on Saturday, 18th March. Free admission! As usual, tea, coffee, cake and lunchtime sandwiches will be available.

There will be 3 speakers at the event. Dr Jan Broadway will be talking about early horticultural societies in Gloucestershire, Dr Jeremy Burchardt (University of Reading) will be talking about Gloucestershire's place in the early allotment movement and Michael Brown ('The Historic Gardener'), will be talking about 'Gory Gardening: Horticulture's Horrible History', including evicted peasants, hermits, murder and 'widow makers'.

There will be displays mounted by Member groups during the Local History Day. Vice Chair Mary Sullivan is working with other committee members to get our display ready, so why not go along and see if we win the prize for the best display!

Geoff North will be bringing his local history bookshop and The History Press will also have a book stall. The Local History Day will also include the presentation of the annual Bryan Jerrard Award.

VERDERERS ELECTION - 15TH FEBRUARY 2017

An election for the office of Queen's Verderer of the Forest of Dean will take place on Wednesday 15th February at Gloucester Cathedral at 11 am.

This ancient role is as important today as it ever was, as the Verderers are charged with the protection of the 'vert and venison' of the Forest.

Voting is in person. Property owners in Gloucestershire (bar the city of Gloucester) may vote.

Please support this historic occasion and come along. Further details of the process can be found at <http://www.deanverderers.org.uk/>. We will email/post to our website additional information as it comes to hand.

UNSUNG HEROES OF THE HISTORY SOCIETY!

This occasional series will feature History Society members who do largely unseen work, and are therefore the unsung heroes of our Society.

In this edition we feature Sue Gordon-Smith, our tireless Publications Officer. You can meet Sue at our indoor meetings where she runs our publications stand. Here she is shown at one of our meetings at Bream.



Since 2004, Sue has been making sure that our journal 'The New Regard' is widely available for sale in many outlets throughout the Forest of Dean and surrounding area. Sue also sends out our publications by post in response to sales through our online 'eshop'. A recent analysis of sales of the New Regard showed that surprisingly the majority of sales are made via outlets and not direct to members. Sue's work is therefore crucial to the long term viability of our journal, and therefore we salute you Sue!

“As Sylvie Was Walking” by Ian Wright

The folk song *As Sylvie Was Walking*, made famous by Pentangle in 1969, has been traced to Ann Howell who was born in October 1832 at Broadwell Lane End, Forest of Dean, where she learnt it from her uncle. The Pentangle version, which can be viewed on YouTube, is called *Once I had a Sweetheart* and leaves out the first three verses. The original version below is from [Ralph Vaughan Williams](#) and [Albert Lancaster Lloyd](#) (Editors), *The Penguin Book of English Folk Songs*, Penguin, London, 1990, and is listed as collected from Mrs. Aston, Australia, 1911:

*As Sylvie was walking down by the riverside,
As Sylvie was walking down by the riverside,
And looking so sadly, and looking so sadly
And looking so sadly upon its swift tide.*

*She thought on the lover that left her in pride,
She thought on the lover that left her in pride,
On the banks of the meadow, on the banks of the meadow
On the banks of the meadow she sat down and cried.*

*And as she sat weeping, a young man came by
And as she sat weeping, a young man came by,
"What ails you, my jewel, what ails you, my jewel,
What ails you, my jewel and makes you to cry?"*

*"I once had a sweetheart and now I have none.
I once had a sweetheart and now I have none.
He's a-gone and he's leaved me, he's a-gone and he's leaved
He's a-gone and he's leaved me in sorrow to mourn."*

*"One night in sweet slumber, I dream that I see,
One night in sweet slumber, I dream that I see,
My own dearest true love, my own dearest true love,
My own dearest true love come smiling to me."*

*"But when I awoke and I found it not so,
but when I awoke and I found it not so,
Mine eyes were like fountains, mine eyes were like fountains
Mine eyes were like fountains where the water doth flow."*

*"I'll spread sail of silver and I'll steer towards the sun.
I'll spread sail of silver and I'll steer towards the sun,
And my false love will weep, and my false love will weep
And my false love will weep for me after I'm gone."*

Ann was the daughter of George Howell (1806-1871) and Eliza Jones (1809 -1872) who married in October 1830. George worked as a coalminer and later as a postman. Diary journals held by a descendant of the Astons in Australia, describe George as being a little wild in his youth when he was fond of drinking and poaching. There is another reference to George being involved in the riots of 1831 when, just like Warren James, he ended up hiding from the military in a disused mine while his family brought him food. However, unlike Warren , he was not betrayed and went back to work in the pits. Sometime later he was involved in a subsidence accident which killed his workmate and, as a result, he “got religion and changed his ways”. It was after this that he became a postman. The diary journals also mention George’s wife Eliza. She used to go to the coal mine with her donkey, "Venture or Venter," and bring home a sack of coal on either side. Sometimes she would be detained and would hasten home through the lanes fearfully looking around in case one of the numerous ghosts of the locality appeared.

Ann had eleven siblings: Sophia, George, Eliza (died as a baby), Emma, John, Keziah, another Eliza, Susan, Lydia, Amelia and Benjamin. Susan’s first husband James Bourne died leaving her with one daughter. In December 1854, Ann married Edward Aston, born in September 1830, in nearby Five Acres, down the road from Broadwell Lane End. His father, Stephen Aston (1806-1886), a collier, and his mother, Amelia Baynham (1808-1875), married in October 1827. Edward had one brother, William, and two sisters, Charlotte and Matilda. In 1851 Edward was working as an apprentice cordwainer or shoemaker with Isaiah Stephens at Berry Hill. Soon after they married Ann and Edward decided to emigrate to Australia which was attracting immigrants from all over the world, partly as a result of the discovery of gold. In 1852 alone, 370,000 immigrants arrived in Australia and the economy of the nation boomed. The total population trebled from 430,000 in 1851 to 1.7 million in 1871.

Ann and Edward sailed from England in 1855 on the ship *The John Banks*, a voyage lasting four months. They arrived in Kapunda, Adelaide and their first daughter, Eliza, was born in December 1856. An uncle of Edward invited them to join him in Carisbrook in the State of Victoria where he lived. In 1854 the population of Carisbrook was only about one hundred but it quickly grown. The discovery of gold in Victoria led to towns springing up throughout the State providing opportunities for miners, tradesmen and shopkeepers. In

the next two years the State's population grew from 77,000 to 540,000 and the 1850's Victoria contributed more than one third of the world's gold output. Ann and Edward travelled by steamer to Sandridge and then continued up country by bullock wagon to Carisbrook with baby Eliza and all their processions. This was a journey of 100 miles and the track was rough. Eliza was quite sickly and her health was made worse by the constant jolting. As a result, Ann and Edward took it in turns to walk next to the wagon carrying Eliza in their arms. When they arrived they had to live in a tent, but sadly Eliza died in December 1857.

Life began to improve for Ann and Edward when they moved into a house in the town where their daughter Charlotte (1857-1928) was born. They soon had two more children, William (1859 -1923) and Sophia (1861-1942). The district population increased dramatically in 1863 when gold was discovered at Majorca, 8km south of Carisbrook, and 15,000 gold diggers rushed to the area. George (1863-1867), Stephen (1865-1935) and another Elisabeth (1867-1900) were born. Tragically George drowned in a creek at the age of four. Matilda (Tilly) was born in December 1873, the last of eight children. Misfortune struck again when it was discovered that Tilly had a defect in her eyes and was partially sighted.

After the initial gold rush around Carisbrook, the mining moved to the North West, leaving a small population living off the land and a number of tradesmen and shopkeepers. At home Ann continued to sing a range of ancient ballads and folk songs. Edward also passed on songs and tales from the Forest of Dean and the children learnt to sing before they could read. Edward joined the brass band which regularly played at public celebrations and funerals. In the evening the family often sat around the old harmonium singing revival hymns or folk songs with Edward and William accompanying them on the flute. The family joined the Wesleyan chapel, singing in the choir, and became popular members of the local community.

At school Tilly used large-type books, from which she learned to read, write and memorize poetry and songs. However, just before her seventh birthday, she became totally blind. Misfortune struck again when Edward became ill and could only work part time. Consequently Ann had to start accepting money for work as a mid-wife, a service she had previously provided free of charge to her neighbours. In October 1881 Edward died. Ann had no choice but to extend her work as district nurse and midwife to support the three remaining children living at home. About a year later Tilly enrolled in a boarding school for the blind in Melbourne.

However deep mining then returned to Carisbrook and brought with it miners from Cornwall and South Wales whose wild behaviours sometimes brought them into conflict with the settled inhabitants who were mainly Irish or English. Not only did the miners' goats eat everything in sight and crime become a problem, but the deep mining undermined the foundations of Ann’s house, resulting in deep cracks in the brick work and leaks. As a result Ann and the remaining family moved to Moonee Ponds, near Melbourne. Tilly finished school at the age of 16 and went to live with her brother, Stephen, and their mother. Tilly would go on to overcome her disability and become a renowned campaigner for the human rights of vision impaired people in Australia and internationally. Tilly's life as a campaigner, author and poet will be told in more detail in the next newsletter.

Standing in front of the shop in Simpson St, Carisbrook, Australia, are Sophie (b1862) and William (b1860) with their parents Ann and Edward Aston, some time in the 1870s. Ann and Edward had eight children, the youngest being Matilda, (Tilly) born in 1873.

*This photo is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License, reproduced courtesy of:
<https://boundforoz.wordpress.com/tag/carisbrook/>*



Why County, Shire, Hundreds? - Part 2 *by Cecile Hunt*

From Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms - Wessex, Mercia, Northumbria and East Anglia came the administrative divisions of Shires; these in turn became, eventually, the counties we know today.

Shires of the Anglo-Saxons divided down into hundreds (wapentakes in Danelaw counties). Hundreds, initially, consisted of 10 households (a tithing); each household held one 'hide' of land - hides could vary in size, it was an area enough to support a household. Hundreds had their own courts; it could raise an army; collect taxes etc; members of a hundred were responsible for each other.

The Normans based the counties of today on the Anglo-Saxon shires. Hundreds changed into administrative divisions and moved away from being groups of households. Under the Normans the 'social units' of parish, manor and township appeared; each county appointed a Knight as a 'Conservator of the Peace'.

Towns separated from the countryside and became known as boroughs. Newnham on Severn was one of the first boroughs. Boroughs were given various privileges including the right to hold a market. Some were self-governed, this was the forerunner of today's Town Council - not all were self governed.

English Parliament evolved from the thirteenth century; representatives to the House of Commons came from the administrative units of counties and boroughs; this system continued, more or less, until the 1832 Reform Act.

The Black Death (1348-1350) saw the decline of the feudal system; local government became more important via town councils, parishes and landlords. Administration of the country was in the main voluntary. From 1500 to the 1832 Reform Act local government, as we know it, started. Some responsibilities were beyond, or too big, for individual communities eg construction of bridges, prisons and asylum; main roads and public highways. Ecclesiastical parishes played a role in the local government of this period and laws were passed for them to carry out certain responsibilities; from 1555 upkeep of roads, from 1605 administering the Poor Law.

Modern government started with the Great Reform Act (1832), it addressed issues of 'rotten' boroughs and enfranchising of industrial towns as new boroughs. The Local Government Act (1888) started standardising a system of local government across England; getting rid of the piecemeal systems that had evolved over the previous centuries. Counties were used as the basis of the new system and statutory counties were created in the process getting rid of areas belonging to one county located in another county (enclaves and exclaves). Gloucestershire saw the parish of Lower Lea transferred to Herefordshire; hamlets of Alstone and Little Washbourne come from Worcestershire.

Local Government Act (1894) created the second tier of local government - dividing administrative counties and county boroughs into either rural or urban districts; municipal boroughs became part of 'urban districts' - a more localised administration. It established civil parishes separating them from ecclesiastical parishes. These were more 'community councils' for areas that didn't have a local government district. Settlement with more than 300 residents automatically became a civil parish; settlements of between 100 - 300 residents could apply to form a civil parish.

Many acts since have attempted reform; the 1972 act created new counties that were unpopular; Local Government Act (1992) reversed some of the 'new' counties back to old county boundaries. The City of

London is an exception to the development of local government in England!

Understanding administrative divisions, and government layers, does help when doing historical research.

[illegible]

**Oral History Project
At
Dean Heritage Centre**

By Nicola Wynn

By Nicola Wynn

Dean Heritage Centre is taking part in the HLF funded Foresters Forest project. The specific Dean Heritage Centre project is to digitise our unique collection of audio cassette tapes from the 1980's and 1990's. These are recorded interviews of Foresters talking about various aspects of their lives in the Forest of Dean. They are fascinating to listen to and reveal what life was like in the Forest fifty to a hundred years ago. The collection was begun by Elsie Olivey, a founder of Dean Heritage Museum, who could see Forest life rapidly changing and decided to preserve people's memories by recording them. These tapes are fragile and decay over time. Digitising them will not only preserve the audio recordings but the digitised recordings will be available to listen to at Dean Heritage Centre and we hope to create an online searchable database. We will also be working in collaboration with other partners in the Foresters Forest project on a Forest dialect project, archiving new oral histories and other educational resources. The project will run for five years and Dean Heritage Centre staff will spend the next few months cataloguing the recordings.

Current oral history guidelines mean that ‘recording agreements’ are drawn up to ensure agreement on consent to be interviewed and use of the recording. However, it was not common to use such agreements in the 1980’s. This means that Dean Heritage Centre must try to contact interviewers and interviewees to ask their permission to use the recordings. Sadly, many of the people interviewed will have died by now so we must then try to contact relatives. Additionally, we would like to collect more information about the people interviewed. We would greatly appreciate help from you in tracing the relatives of the people interviewed. We have created a list of names which are shown below. **Please have a look** and if you are a relative or friend or you have any information for us, or are interested in oral history then please contact Nicola Wynn by email Nicola@deanheritagecentre.com or tel 01594 822170.

List of interviewees and the places they are from (where known):

William Bowdler (Soudley), Alfred Warren, Liz Hiatt (The Pludds), Winifred & Archie Freeman (Cinderford), Albert Meek (Cinderford), Frances Webb (Cinderford), Molly Curtis (Cinderford), Tom Gibb (Mitcheldean), Jesse Hodges, John Griffiths (Mitcheldean), Mrs Amy Adams Cinderford), William Simmonds, May Parry (Cinderford), Cyril Trigg (Lydney), Mary Hale (Parkend), Howard Moore (Drybrook), Ronald Jones (Newnham), Harry Roberts (Cinderford), Harry Toomer (Ruardean), Marie Hobbs (Cinderford), Caroline Nicholls (Coleford), Gurnos Roberts (Christchurch), Amy Howells (Ruspidge), Hylton Miles (Buckshaft), Frederick Baden Watkins (Flaxley Abbey), Milsom Cooper (Coleford), Mrs Edith Harvey (Coleford), Harry Barton (Cinderford), George Rogers (Broadwell), Doris Harvey (Christchurch), Howard Moore (Drybrook), Caroline Nichols (Coleford), Elizabeth Ibbotson (Soudley), Ted Nelmes, Gilbert Baghurst, Percy Basset, Harry Byett (Ruspidge), Charlie Hazell (Ruspidge), Doris Turner, Harold Wheeler, Mrs M Addis, Emily Rosser, Mr Ted Gwilliam & Mrs Marion Gwilliam (English Bicknor), Mrs Eunice Porter (Coleford), Mrs Millwater (Coleford), and Mr Albert Davies (Coleford).

List of interviewers

Elsie Olivey, Helen Bass, Alison Parfitt, Wendy Corum, Jane Reynolds and Samantha Weak.

Meetings In Review by John Powell & Keith Walker



On Saturday 12th November, some 75 members and guests enjoyed Dr Roger Head's succinct and engaging talk on "Highnam Court through the Ages".

A house was recorded at Highnam as far back as 1022. In 1033 Ulfine le Rue was the owner of the house and estate, but his men killed several monks during an altercation on the road to Gloucester. As a result the estate was forfeited to the church. The estate was large and extended up to the walls of St Peters Abbey (now Gloucester Cathedral). The house was rebuilt in 1380 and became known as "The Great Grange".

After the dissolution, the estate became Crown property, but was later sold to John Arnold. During the Civil War the Royalist forces of Lord Herbert used Highnam as a base. Consequently because of the damage sustained to the original house during the Civil War, it was rebuilt for William Cooke in 1658. The house underwent changes and improvements whilst in the ownership of the Cooke and Guise families. In 1838 the wealthy Thomas Gambier Parry purchased the house and estate and made it his life's work to restore the house and gardens. He also built Highnam Church. Following Thomas's death in 1888, the house remained in the possession of the family, finally being inherited by his great grandson Tom Fenton. Unfortunately the house and gardens deteriorated badly during the 20th century. Roger Head said he knew of the property as he had fished the ponds there for many years. He developed a great desire to own Highnam Court, and eventually in 1993 was able to purchase the house and parts of the remaining estate. With permission he was able to demolish the Victorian additions to the original house, and then spent 23 years restoring the house and re-establishing the 40 acres of gardens and 10 acres of lake. The gardens are now used as a vehicle to raise charity funds (largely for 'Pied Piper'), and over 20000 visitors a year visit them.

After tea Ron Beard gave a short talk about his father's experiences with four of his pals from Cinderford Bridge who joined up and served together in WW1. Ron described how the young lads were pitched into the Battle of Ancre, and later rescued an injured officer from 'no-man's land'. We were able to hear an extract from an audio recording of Ron's father speaking about his experiences. It was fascinating to hear the Forest dialect in action!

K.W.

There's a snag to researching our ancient roots. It's not as simple as pouring over musty old documents in your county records office where, if you are lucky, the work is at least partially done for you...the only way is to buy a shovel, dig a trench, and get dirty.

Following your nose and being led on by a smattering of 'finds' — everything from snail shells to iron slag, fragments of flint and lots of rotting timbers (trees to you and me) — archaeologists have then to let their imaginations take over. Hey-presto, you have a lost lake and a pre-historic boat!

Stephen Clarke, of Monmouth, is an expert in this field of discovery. A man much admired for his fortitude and determination, Mr Clarke shared his exploration of 'The Lost Lake' in an excellent talk to members on Saturday 4th December at the West Dean Centre, Bream.

This is 'real' exploratory and investigative archaeology, and Mr Clarke was eager to point out that there is much more to do and much more to find around the edges and even in the bottom of what was once a



There's a snag to researching our ancient roots. It's not as simple as pouring over musty old documents in your county records office where, if you are lucky, the work is at least partially done for you...the only way is to buy a shovel, dig a trench, and get dirty.

Following your nose and being led on by a smattering of 'finds' — everything from snail shells to iron slag, fragments of flint and lots of rotting timbers (trees to you and me) — archaeologists have then to let their imaginations take over. Hey-presto, you have a lost lake and a pre-historic boat!

Stephen Clarke, of Monmouth, is an expert in this field of discovery. A man much admired for his fortitude and determination, Mr Clarke shared his exploration of 'The Lost Lake' in an excellent talk to members on Saturday 4th December at the West Dean Centre, Bream.

This is 'real' exploratory and investigative archaeology, and Mr Clarke was eager to point out that there is much more to do and much more to find around the edges and even in the bottom of what was once a great post-glacial lake sloshing around the bowl of Monmouth and close to the borders of the Forest of Dean.

Nicely illustrated with slides, Mr Clarke told the story of the inception of the lake some 10,000 years ago

At the close of the Society's first meeting of the New Year, held at the West Dean Centre, Bream, on January 14th, it was pleasing to report that free mining, one of the Forest of Dean's oldest and most coveted traditions, is in rude good health.

There are challenges aplenty in the future. For instance, to guarantee survival it may be that rules over qualification will have to be changed to allow for the fact that few babies are now born within the boundary of the Hundred of St Briavels. Hiccups apart, Rich Daniels, chairman of the Forest of Dean Free Miners' Association, skipped along with a fluent, interesting, upbeat and positive message to an enthusiastic gathering of 99 members and visitors.

There were, he said, around 30 active free miners. One new level was about to be worked and there was at least one more in the pipeline — evidence, that given a little encouragement, Forest coal would still find its way to market.

Mr Daniels said he hoped fresh impetus could be obtained by a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund which might assist a young person to begin a new career working underground.

The stage was shared with local historian and union official Ian Wright who explored the book "Custom, Work & Market Capitalism — The Forest of Dean Colliers 1788-1888" written by Chris Fisher originally in 1978, but recently republished by Breviary Press. Chris is now a sheep-farmer in his native Australia!

Mr Wright gave a fascinating insight into the buttyman system of working which was for many years common in the Forest coalfield. Buttymen achieved deals with colliery owners and then employed men and boys to win coal at a given rate. Often they employed family members, but some worked as many as 70 miners.

Following the break, the increasingly popular 'Twenty minute slot' was filled by John Powell, the Society's Publicity Officer, who explored the fate of a number of sail and steam vessels which came to grief in the Severn estuary.

J.P.

