

# FOREST OF DEAN LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

*news*  
January 2015

## Inside:

- Introducing our new Chairman
- The new project "The Forester's Forest"
- Biff bash bosh! Prize fighting in Lydney

## Book Reviews

*'That devil's wonder  
That tore our lives asunder  
And left behind a nightmare trail  
Of horrors scattered through the brain,  
Of shattered hopes and memories fail'*

Our friends at Yorkley A&E continue to be busy, and David Adams has recently authored a short book containing 'Scenes From The Life of Poet and War Casualty F. W. Harvey'.

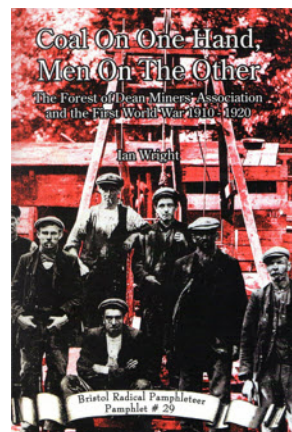
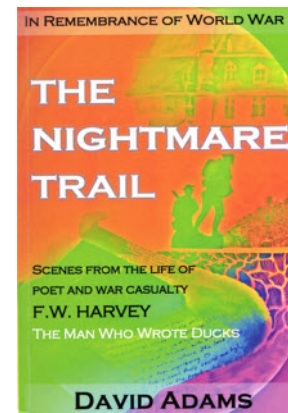
Countering the usual focus on Harvey the War Poet, David Adams presents a series of 'snapshots' of Harvey's life in reverse chronology. Seemingly a sensitive child, his mother encouraged him to become a solicitor, and he was articled to a Gloucester solicitor until World War One intervened. He enlisted with his two brothers, and fought in France. Harvey was deeply affected by his time in the army, and in the book Dr Chris Nancollas promotes the view that Harvey subsequently suffered what we now know as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

David Adams helps us understand through the book how the terrible events of World War One cast a shadow over the rest of Harvey's life, most of which was spent peacefully in Yorkley. The book, which is recommended, contains many of Harvey's poems which are used cleverly to illustrate the series of snapshots which help us to gain a fuller understanding of Harvey the man.

**"The Nightmare Trail" 78 pages ISBN 978-0-9572087-4-2**

**Price: £7.50**

Available via [www.yorkleyae.weebly.com](http://www.yorkleyae.weebly.com) or from the Forest Bookshop, Coleford



History Society member Ian Wright initially researched the 'comb out' of miners in WW1 for the Society WW1 project. However Ian soon discovered a much wider story about the Forest miners and their struggle for decent pay and conditions, and decided to produce a book. The story starts before the war years when the Forest of Dean Miners Association became the leading trade union acting on behalf of the men. For over thirty years the Miner's Agent was G. H Rowlinson. The book describes how during the war years Rowlinson gradually became alienated from those he represented. Many miners openly opposed the Great War whereas "Rowlinson believed the miners' interests lay in their heritage as 'the patriotic son's of a great and glorious empire'". Eventually Rowlinson was forced to resign and the more radical figure of Herbert Booth was elected as the Agent. However this is sub text compared with the main theme of the miners' struggle to achieve better pay, moving from the local butty system through to nationally negotiated pay. Included in the book is an interesting illustration which shows that during World War One, miners' wages increased by 100% (the cost of living increased by 120% during the same period), the coal price increased by 180%, and owners profits increased by 260%!

This is an important, well researched volume, and fills a gap in our local history by providing a social and political commentary on the miners' struggles in the early twentieth century. The book is very highly recommended.

**"Coal on the One Hand, Men on the Other" 109 pages**

**Price: £5.00**

Available via [www.brh.org.uk](http://www.brh.org.uk) or from the Forest Bookshop, Coleford



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Registered Charity  
No: 1094700

Printed by  
Hanley Court Printers

## Editors Notes

Firstly I have to say 'thanks' to Averil Kear, Cheryl Mayo, and Diana Standing for their reviews of various meetings which you can read in this edition. They have stepped into the breach whilst the Committee searched for a replacement for Joyce Moss, who was our Publicity Officer until recently. Almost literally as this newsletter was going to press, our Chair, Simon Moore, was able to secure the services of John Powell as our new Publicity Officer. As many of you may know, John is a very experienced former journalist, and expert on fishing in the Severn! I hope to include some further biographical details in a future edition of the newsletter about John Powell, and also Callum McKelvie who recently joined the Committee as Web Editor.

By coincidence John Powell has provided the feature article for the centre pages of this newsletter. His unusual chosen subject is prize fighting, particularly focusing on a bout which took place in fields near Lydney in 1889.

Apart from providing regular features and news in the newsletter, I am very keen to see contributions from as many different people as possible, and the centre pages are indeed a blank canvas for contributions from you, the members! So if you have a story that you want to tell, please don't be shy! Send your contributions in! If you need any help in researching your subject please let me know as we have many experienced researchers on the Committee who would be only too willing to help.

Finally can I draw your attention to our Vice Chair Mary Sullivan's article explaining the Landscape Partnership Award to the 'Forester's Forest' project. Mary has worked hard on behalf of the Society in conjunction with the Forestry Commission and other bodies to help secure nearly £3 million pounds for the project.

*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.*

## Q&A with Simon Moore - our new Chair



**Q:** Although you have been our conservation officer for a good while, can you re-introduce yourself by letting us know a few details about yourself and your family. Are you, for instance, a 'Forester'?

**A:** *"I am a Forester, well.. technically not born within the St Briavels hundred...like many recent generation 'Foresters' I was born at Gloucester Royal, but from Forest stock, my Dad comes from a farming background, growing up on a small farm in Drybrook, and my Mum is from Cinderford. My maternal Grandfather worked at Eastern United until it closed and like so many others finished out his working years at Ranks. I grew up in Drybrook, and went to Drybrook county primary and then the Royal Forest of Dean Grammer School. I am a Chartered Building Surveyor and spend a good proportion of my working life dealing with listed and historic buildings amongst other things. After leaving home I lived in Coleford and then moved to Lydney where I still live with my wife Jane and daughter Katie. Apart from the time I give to the History Society, I am a member of Parkend players, a Trustee at the Viney Hill Christian Adventure Centre and a Governor at St Anthonys Free school in Cinderford, so with working my life is pretty full."*

**Q:** How do you believe the Society has changed in the last few years?

**A:** *"Well in some respects I am not sure that it has, I read recently some old meeting notes from the society archives from the early days in the late 1940's and things seemed much the same; concerns over finding suitable venues, places to visit, speakers and concerns over attendance figures, fees and retaining people on the society committee....which are all constant issues! I think we are seeing a change, less members seem to be part of the society for research purposes and more simply from a general interest point of view. We are embracing information technology far more, which is an inevitability of modern life and one reason why we are seeing this change, as generally it is much easier to do basic overview research today.... with the internet."*

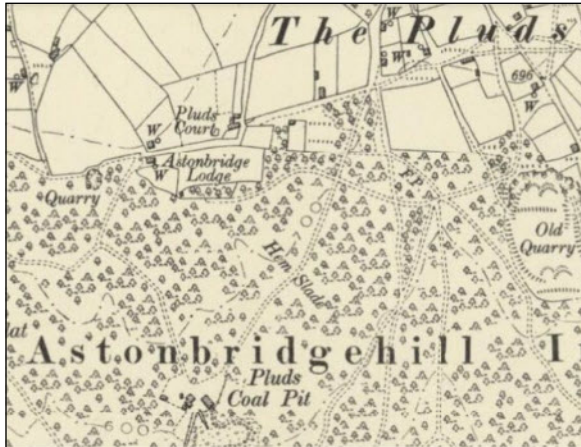
**Q:** As you start your time as Chair, are there any specific goals you want to achieve?

**A:** *"Well...I take on this role from some very capable and experienced historians and I find myself Chair of a long established and in some respects a well oiled machine, we have a strong committee and so am not setting out to change anything in a major way, and so my primary goal is to keep things running. We do need to encourage younger members... no disrespect to our existing membership.. but without fresh generations coming into the society and taking on the mantle of custodians of our heritage we may lose momentum quite quickly! The Foresters Forest project that we are taking a leading role in with the Forestry and other organisations will be a fantastic opportunity to make a difference and engage with younger generations."*

**Q:** Are there any immediate challenges you face as Chair?

**A:** *"Well... logistical ones really...trying to make time for the workload, with the other organisations that I am involved with. Looking to the future of the societies managing committee, without which the organisation will crumble, we do need to attract new members to the committee to ensure succession and rotation of functions which all helps to maintain enthusiasm and a certain freshness. We have some very hard working and loyal committee members, which has made taking on this role much easier, but it would be nice for all of us to see some new faces at the committee meetings to help share the load."*

## Plaques & Monuments - Pludds Colliery

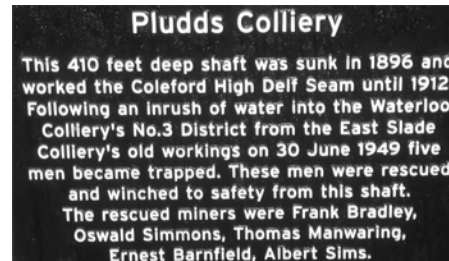


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The Gloucester Citizen of 30th June 1949 reported the dramatic news that: "A number of men, estimated at between five and ten men were trapped when the Arthur and Edward Colliery, Lydbrook, was flooded this morning. Water broke through like a great tidal wave near the coal face from some old workings and over 150 raced for their lives. The men stumbled waist-high in water over distances of up to three and half miles to the bottom of the shaft. It was thought that there were still five or ten men trapped at the flooded workings, and at mid-day res-

cue operations began. It was hoped to extricate them through an air ventilation shaft about a mile from the colliery in the Ruardean Woodside direction". In fact the men were rescued via the shaft of the former Pludds Colliery. The shaft was made safe by contractors working for the Coal Authority in 2008.

A plaque was made and mounted at the site of the former Pludds Colliery through the efforts of Eric Morris, the well known former freeminer & quarryman and President of the Freeminers Association who died aged 80 in January 2014.



## Meetings in Review - Extra

On the 19th November a small group of FODLHS members met at the Soldiers of Gloucestershire Museum in Gloucester Docks for a short guided tour.

Although small this museum is packed full of artefacts relating to the Soldiers of Gloucestershire who have served their regiments since 1694. (The Glosters) have been present at many of the turning points in British History; battles in the American Revolutionary War, defeating Napoleon, the defence of Dunkirk and fighting the spread of communism in Korea. Our guide Bill Bratty brought the displays alive for us with poignant stories not depicted. One of the first show cases held a model of Francis George Miles VC (9 July 1896 – 8 November 1961) who was a Forest of Dean recipient of the Victoria Cross, the highest and most prestigious award for gallantry in the face of the enemy that can be awarded to British and Commonwealth forces. There was also mention of another of our VC award winners, Angus Buchanan, VC MC (11 August 1894 – 1 March 1944) who was the son of a doctor from Coleford.

After our tour there was time to view the interactive displays, contemporary film records, the magnificent medal collection, highly decorative uniforms, weapons and souvenirs from all corners of the globe. These have been donated and collected over the years by past soldiers and their families and are a tribute to their service to their country.



Travelling around in the 21st century is so easy. We have good roads; satellite navigation; computer programmes to calculate distance, time and direction, road maps that have been around since 1675 and signposts. Signposts, or guideposts, started to appear in 1667 when they were, by government directive, erected where roads crossed and on moorlands.

Travel was not so easy in earlier times. Roads in the 16th and 17th century could become deadly places to travel, the metalled road surfaces of the Roman period long since worn out, compacted dirt in summer turned to deep mud in bad weather and winter; where horses and riders were known to drown in really bad conditions. To travel any distance needed good forward planning. In reasonable conditions it could take a day to travel twenty-five miles. Goods moved by road were carried either by wagon or cart, packhorses or mule. Men and women rode or walked, no carriages in those days only litters for those unable, or not wanting, to walk or ride. Carriage travel was unknown until the middle of 1500s when Elizabeth I became one of the first people to own one.

After the Great Fire of London the government of the day drew up an Act in 1667 dictating the width of streets in towns. This Act stipulated that the minimum width of a street must be 14 feet enough to allow two carts to pass comfortably. Streets with two storey houses had to be 18 to 20 feet wide and the main streets with three and four storey houses on them must be 30 to 40 feet wide.

Market towns usually had the market place in the centre of town, which if not too modernised can still be recognised today. Roads feeding into the market place had narrow entrances; this allowed, on market days, hurdles to be placed across them making a secure enclosure for all livestock to be contained in.

Distance markers were used on Roman roads, a stone placed every thousandth double-step; these were used to ensure efficient and timely marching by soldiers. A thousand in Latin being 'mille', the distance marched equating to 1618 yards – some of these stones still exist, mainly in museums around the country. In the era of turnpike roads milestones were made compulsory by an Act of 1767. They had several purposes: informational, giving directions and distances; helping to keep stage coaches on schedule; and dictating charges for postal deliveries before postal rates were laid down in 1840. By the 1800s there were around 20,000 miles of roads with their associated milestones. These stones have disappeared over the years. In 2001 the Milestone Society was established to record, research and conserve the remaining milestones for future generations, see [www.milestone-society.co.uk](http://www.milestone-society.co.uk) for further information.

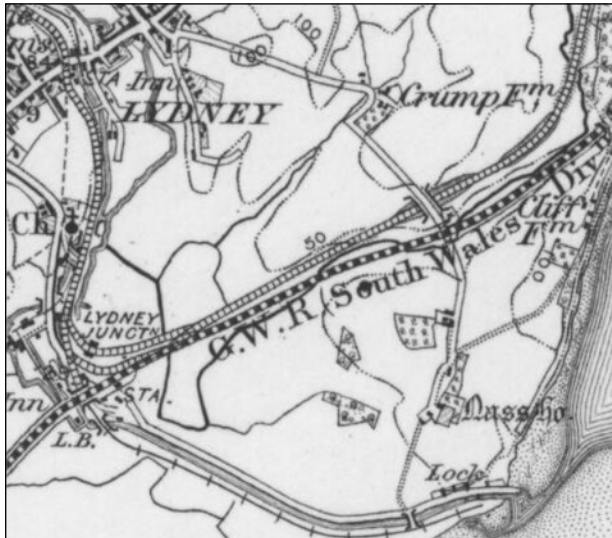
By the 19th century rail travel took over from road travel causing the downfall of stagecoach companies and turnpike trusts. In the 21st century road tolls are coming back into fashion: congestion charges in cities; M6 toll road, and nearer to the forest, Severn Bridge tolls – nothing is new!



## A Riverside Battle to Decide Who Was ‘Best in the West’!

**Society member John Powell explores the dark and murky world of bare knuckle prize-fighting and investigates an unusual contest held in a field on the banks of the Severn.**

It was possibly the most notorious title fight ever staged in England. The contestants, seeking to settle who was the best lightweight bare knuckle prizefighter in the West, came toe to toe in a makeshift ring of stakes and rope in a Severnside field a mile from Lydney. But 10 minutes into the illegal punch-up the police, who had been hiding nearby, burst from cover. *The Western Mail* reported: “Five rounds having been fought to an accompaniment of cheers and curses, the police showed themselves and a stampede followed.”



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The facts were straightforward. The police admitted afterwards that someone locally had spilled the beans and they “had wind” the fight was going to take place. Under the cover of darkness members of the local constabulary were strategically placed in and around the town’s railway station awaiting the 1.23am passenger train from South Wales. Around 50 men crowded onto the platform and were soon on their way towards the harbour being guided by an unknown local man to a quiet field near Cliff Farm.

It was June 27, 1889 and, at last, prize-fighters Morgan Crowther, of Newport, and James ‘Chaffy’ Hayman, of Bristol, were to settle who was best and who would pick up the purse.

Both men were described in *The Western Mail* as “known to fame in the pugilistic world” and both tipped the scales at 8 st 8 lbs. Morgan Crowther, who was said to have fought everywhere from churchyards to gentlemen’s clubs, has been described as a “phenomenally durable” fighter who thought nothing of a 40 round contest!

They had been due to fight the previous week at Chippenham but the police had intervened before a punch was thrown. Behind the scenes followers of “The Fancy” — the name given to prizefighters and their followers — had rearranged for the contest to take place near Lydney. Police followed behind the excited group and watched from the cover of a hedge as Crowther and Hayman stripped to their waists and in the first light of dawn began to fight.

To be sure of successful convictions the officers had to be confident money was being exchanged. The fifth round was underway when betting was heard going on. Then the trap was sprung. There was pandemonium as the crowd scattered, the fighters, their seconds, and the

spectators running in all directions. PCs Slater and Murphy were among those in hot pursuit and after a couple of hundred yards captured Crowther. Another man, Thomas Shirley, of Cardiff, was also arrested. Crowther allegedly told the officer he wished they had held off for a few more minutes as he “had the fight in his own hands”. He admitted the contest was for a purse.

Police began to search the area and were soon in luck. PCs Wilks and Newport were on watch at Severn Bridge Station when eight men arrived. Two were regarded as “highly suspicious” and taken into custody. The others were allowed to leave by train to Berkeley but only after giving their names and addresses. Hayman was reportedly spotted passing through Chepstow. But his freedom was short-lived.

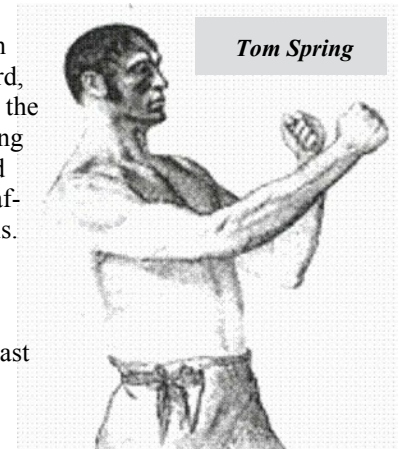
Hayman and Crowther were charged with committing a breach of the peace and fighting for money. Six others faced charges of aiding and abetting. Four months later they all appeared at Quarter Sessions in Gloucester and admitted the offences. The sentences were expected to reflect the determination of the authorities to stamp out prizefighting and both fighters were ordered to complete hard labour for a month. The same treatment was handed out to three of those closely involved in organising the contest, while spectators were bound over to be of good behaviour for six months.

Four years later Crowther was before the magistrates again, this time seeking to take over a public house in Newport. The police said that in view of his record they felt bound to object. However, having been told that Crowther had mended his ways and given up prizefighting, boxing, betting and gambling they agreed to grant him the opportunity “to mend his evil ways.”

Six months before the Lydney prizefight, two Forest of Dean colliers William Perkins and Arthur Roberts, both of Coleford, had been caught stripped to their waists and about to fight in the woods on the edge of town. A crowd of about 40 were looking on but they all vanished when the police arrived. Perkins and his second, Edward Smith, admitted a charge of causing an affray and were ordered to be of good behaviour for six months. Roberts and his second, John Coren, failed to appear and warrants were issued for their arrests.

The days of prizefighting were now close to an end and the last contest is believed to have taken place in 1895.

In the 1820s it was said to be the most popular sport in England, keenly followed by thousands of fans. Locally, Tom Spring, of Fownhope, — his real name was Thomas Winter — became the English heavyweight champion in 1821 and held the title until his retirement in 1824. However, with the passing of time, prizefighting began to lose its acceptability and many frowned on its close links with drinking and gambling. Contests were usually held on the edge of towns or in isolated country communities. There were few rules save that contestants fought without gloves. The times of rounds could also be designated and contests were usually fought until one fighter could no longer continue or “threw in the towel”.





The Committee is delighted to announce that Averil Kear has been elected as a Vice President of the Society following a vote at the recent AGM.

Averil has previously served on the Committee in many different roles, including Chair. Averil is still serving as Enquiries Officer, dealing with queries from the public.



Articles from out of print New Regards are now available for download from the FODLHS eshop. To buy an article go to <http://store.forestofdeanhistory.org.uk> then click on the reprints tab. Articles being sold as downloads are charged at 15p per page, with a minimum charge of 75p, and a maximum charge of £3.75 per article.

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

***Members can obtain a discount, by using the voucher code when prompted. Note that the voucher code will change from 'Lydney' to 'Gibraltar' on 1st February 2015.***

## News from the Membership Secretary

Thank you for paying your subscription, enclosed with this newsletter is your membership card. Membership runs from October to September each year and the programme card runs from January to January - this anomaly is currently being looked into by your committee as it does cause confusion amongst members.

Welcome to these recently joined members:

Mr A Okenden, Hope Mansell  
Mr D Young, Chingford, East London  
Mrs C D Stephens, Cirencester  
Mr P Burry, Purley, Surrey  
Mr G Ford, Cinderford  
Mr G Melville and Ms C Driessen, Blakeney  
Mr S Giles, Cinderford  
Mr W Parker, Bream  
Mr P Goode, Dymock



Lottery funding is being sought for the Society World War One Project (Home Front Dean). The intention is to develop the material provided for the recent exhibition at the Dean Heritage Centre into a book with associated digital material. The target date for publication is 2016.

Those of you who missed the exhibition at the Heritage Centre might like to know that a smaller display has been prepared for Gloucestershire Libraries. The display has already been shown at Coleford and Lydney libraries, but can be seen at Cinderford Library between 5th January and 2nd February, and at Newent Library between 9th and 27th February.



## Landscape Partnership Award

### "The Forester's Forest"

by Mary Sullivan

Two years ago a large number of varied community groups came together to compile a bid for the largest type of lottery funding – a Landscape Partnership Award. 54 separate projects have been welded together to form a cohesive programme. All that work has now been rewarded with the HLF setting aside £2.9 million to be spent in the old Hundred of St Briavels over the next 6.5 years.

The Forest of Dean Local History Society will be a key member of this project with a seat on the Programme Board. The Forestry Commission are the lead partner and will employ the Programme Manager and his/her administrative assistant. The bid was successful because it tied together ecological, social and historical aspects of the community's unique heritage, shaped by its geology. The area was described as "the land between two rivers, isolated and bypassed but yet a cradle of industry and a stronghold of nature. Not quite England but not in Wales." The project will galvanise action to halt decline in the character of the landscape and reinvigorate the cultural heritage, linking community associations with the industrial, cultural and natural heritage.

The 18 month development phase will include an extensive ecological survey of plants, rare trees, butterflies, insects, bats and other wildlife. Alongside there will be an archaeological survey building on the results from the recent LIDAR survey undertaken by Gloucestershire Archaeology team. Additionally, to start returning some of the open spaces in the Forest to their former condition, controlled grazing will be trialled. All of these events will need to include the use of volunteers from the local community.

It is hoped that the 5 year delivery phase will result in new heritage trails and village histories, captured photographs and oral histories, recording of dialect, an online Heritage Atlas, Open days and training in all sorts of skills for younger people in the community. Musical and literary traditions will also be recorded and promoted. A most important aspect of this whole project is to "grow Foresters, younger people who understand and appreciate the unique place they live and its heritage".

Our society will particularly be involved in aspects titled "Unearthing the Heritage". Following surveying of the basic archaeological and historical structure of the area, specific sites will be chosen for in depth studying and recording. And "Telling the Story" should lead to toolkits for the putting together of new trails, finding and checking details for inclusion in the Heritage Atlas and other ways of providing information for people wanting to get to know the area better. We will be taking an overview of the historical accuracy of items as they are produced. So there will be many ways for members to get involved in the different aspects of the project. You may want to undertake some surveying of wildlife or archaeological sites or help in putting together a photo archive or preparing a history of or trail in your local village.

We will keep members up to date with the project as it evolves.



## Meetings In Review



*Gunns Mill circa 2000.*

*Photo reproduced by kind permission of  
Chris Morris.*

At our AGM on **4th October**, Kate Biggs talked to us about **the recent work of the Forest of Dean Building Preservation Trust (BPT)**, which was formed to raise funds and manage work to conserve ‘at risk’ historic buildings in the Dean.

The Trust’s first project was to continue the conservation of Whitecliff Furnace, near Coleford, which was previously owned by the Dean Heritage Centre. Some work was done in the 1980s. More was done through the Overlooking-the-Wye project in 2011. Subsequently, the ironworks site was donated to the BPT. During the past two years further major repairs were made. This Scheduled Monument attracts a steady stream of visitors and information panels are now in place.

Ms Biggs emphasised that the most important historic building in the Forest is Gunns Mill Furnace near

Flaxley. Like Whitecliff, it now belongs to the Trust and is another Scheduled Ancient Monument ‘at risk’; English Heritage has described it as the best-preserved charcoal-fuelled furnace in northern Europe. The mill dates from 1625 and was rebuilt 1682-83. Bill Parker, now a Trustee of the BPT, purchased the property in 1994 to save it from development, and in 2001 English Heritage shored and weatherproofed the building. The challenge now is build a large bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for full conservation works and to find a suitable end-use.

The most recent acquisition of the Trust has been the Church of St James at Lancaut. In the 1980s, it was owned and conserved by the local Lancaut Church Preservation Trust and subsequently passed for safe keeping to the Gloucestershire Heritage Trust. Sadly that trust founded and the church ended up as Crown property. The BPT purchased it from the Crown in 2013 for the princely sum of £1. Funds have recently been raised for conservation repair and raising community involvement.

Further information about the Trust will be available shortly via a new website, details of which will be emailed to members at the time. In the meantime, if anyone wishes to make a donation, or to become involved in the work of the Trust in some way, then please email our Secretary at [secretary@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk](mailto:secretary@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk) and she will put you in contact with the right people.

There was a full turnout on **Saturday 8th November** at Drybrook Memorial Hall despite the typical dark and wet November weather.

Dr Mark Lewis called his talk “**The Severn Tsunami**” but then proceeded to take us through the many major flooding events in the known history of the river. After explaining how the Severn tidal system worked he presented details of the river height in Roman times and how much the river has silted up since thus raising the land levels to those of today. Examination of the sediments showed evidence of the presence of the salt water fossil, foraminifera.

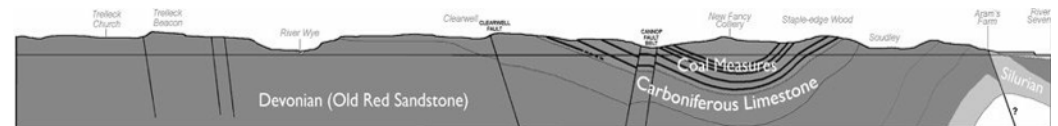


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He then took us through records of floods up the Severn. Some 17th century illustrated written records showed drowning animals with people clinging to trees and Church steeples sticking out above the water. There was a record of a lady who drowned at her home some 4 miles inland. He proved how these extensive floods were from excessively high river tides and not local flood water as has happened in our recent floods such as at Tewkesbury. He showed dates on markers near the river and on buildings and explained how those dates referred to river floods. To under-



On **Saturday 6th December**, Dave Green gave an illustrated talk on “**The Geology of the Forest of Dean.**” The Forest was originally part of a very large swampy area, extending to what we now know as Europe. Dave explained that the rocks of the Forest of Dean were originally laid down as horizontal sheets, but were later compressed and folded about 300 million years ago due to a local fault line which has existed for 600-700 million years.

The fault line which affects the Forest geology goes as far as Bath, where it ‘caused’ the Bath hot springs, and north beyond May Hill and past the Malverns. The effects of the fault line caused the Forest to be lifted out of the swampy area, and essentially gave us the geological conditions we see today where there is effectively an outer ring of old red sandstone, with an inner ring of carboniferous limestone abutting the coalfields. Because of the effect of the fault, there are steeply dipping beds of rock in the east of the Forest (Mitcheldean), whereas the rock beds slope more gently in the west. The Usk anticline (uplift) created a gap between the FOD and South Wales coal fields, and the syncline (fold with younger layers closer to the centre of the structure) in the middle of the Forest help prevent the erosion of the Forest coalfields.

Dave then showed photographs of various Forest quarries and other locations to demonstrate the different rock layers, and the dipping beds. Apparently just north of Lydney harbour a famous rare rock formation exists, namely ‘Chapel Point Calcrete’, otherwise known as Bishop’s Frome Limestone. For those who want to explore this subject further, Dave Green recommends “Geology explained in the Forest of Dean & Wye Valley” by William Dreghorn.

Dave Green is a teacher of geology. His knowledge and teaching ability were very evident during this interesting and informative talk.