

FOREST OF DEAN LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

news
May 2015

Inside:

Follow Ron Beard
down 'The Long Path'

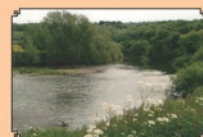
Also 'No Pit Props in
the Forest of Dean'

Book

Review

By Cheryl Mayo

Halcyon Days



A young boy's life in the village
of Lydbrook, 1930 to 1943

JAG Beard

Gordon Beard grew up in Lydbrook and his wonderful memoir covers the period before and during the early years of World War II, from earliest memories to the end of his primary schooling. Life in Lydbrook was very busy in those days, and there is a wealth of description of village life, from the abundance of shops - including three bakers, numerous sweetshops, butchers and 'even a branch of Lloyds Bank' - to early school years, which Mr Beard appears to have thoroughly enjoyed. He also brings to life his numerous cousins, aunts and uncles of his own family - characters all. Written in a wry, self-deprecating style, Mr Beard's reminiscences are beautifully evocative, whether he is describing his physical surroundings, the goings-on of his rascally mates, or the tale of the pub with the room where, it is still told even today, they piled the dead bodies from some Civil War skirmish, '...although the said pub wasn't even opened until the 19th century, but we didn't know that and neither do the visitors.' As an insight into how life was lived in rural communities not that long ago, this book is a delight. For those

who grew up in such communities, perhaps in Lydbrook itself, or elsewhere in the Forest of Dean, Mr Beard's book will prove to be a wonderful trip down memory lane.

ISBN-10: 1502755440

172 pages

Available from Amazon, priced at £8.75

Activity at Gunns Mill

Long standing members of the FODLHS will be very familiar with the large building wrapped in polythene at the junction of the Littledean and Mitcheldean Roads at Flaxley. This is Gunns Mill and is one of the most impressive sites of its kind in England. Last year, it was generously donated to the Forest of Dean Buildings Preservation Trust (FODBPT) by Mr Bill Parker. We have been fortunate enough to obtain funding since then, principally from the Gloucestershire Environmental Trust, to refurbish the site.



The polythene and scaffolding have been repaired and inspected and banners have been made and hung on the scaffolding to inform the public of its name and the grant giving bodies who are supporting the work. Current work is aimed at clearing the site of rubbish, renewing the boundary walls and enclosing the remainder of the site with fencing. A parking area is being identified and a spectator area defined so that as work continues on the Mill itself, visitors will be able to see the work progressing. Access has been opened up to the rear of the Mill so that major repairs can be carried out on the boundary wall at the back.

Most of this work is progressing and should be finished soon so the Trustees Committee are now applying themselves to the task of raising the necessary funding to start work on the Mill itself. The project is expected to take several years.

Dave Berry, Chairman, FODBPT

News

MAY 2015

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No: 1094700

Printed by
Hanley Court Printers

Editors Notes

You may have noticed that the newsletter is a month later than usual. The newsletter will now be published in May, August, November and February. Consequently because of the number of 'Meetings In Review' in this edition, a couple of articles provided by members have had to be held over until the next edition.

In the middle of this edition there is an interesting article written by Ron Beard, who literally stepped into the footsteps of his father to find and record the route of 'The Long Path'. Ron also provided the photograph on the front cover. The route of the path was hard to trace in places, but the coming of spring revealed its true course, as the growth of the bluebells demonstrate in the photograph.

Members who attended the meeting on 7th March showed much interest in the 20 minute feature on the production of Ribena at Coleford in the 1960s. Member Sally McGoon has provided a short piece in the newsletter ('The Purple Experiment'), in which she describes how H. W. Carter and Co conducted experiments on herself and other local school children in the early 1950's at Lydney Grammar School. The photograph accompanying the piece shows the renowned Dr Charley conducting experiments on children at Bells Grammar School during the same period. You can see the full sized photo of the scene on the SunGreen web site;
<http://www.sungreen.co.uk/Coleford/xBells1950Charley.htm>
Are you or your friends shown on the photo? Do let us know!

Finally in case you missed the publicity or the email from our Secretary Cheryl Mayo, the British Association for Local History has decided to make the FODLHS the recipient of its 'Newsletter Award' for 2015. The award will be presented in Birmingham on 6th June. Many thanks to everyone who sent complimentary messages to me about this award.

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.

Views from the Chair - with Simon Moore

So, here we are half way through my first year as Chair of the Society, and already we have reached the end of our indoor programme until September.

However, we have a full line up of summer events which we hope you will support and enjoy. The booking forms for both summer coach trips are included with this newsletter, but please do not hesitate to contact Cecile for more information about these events. It would be great to see both well supported.



Our next event will be a talk by Dr Nicholas Orme of Exeter University on the Gleyndour Family of Newland and will take place in Newland Church at 3pm on Saturday 6th June. If you are intending to go to this special event, please let our Meetings Secretary know via email (Meetings@forestofdeanhhistory.org.uk), or phone (01989 562424).

As you will have seen, this is an 'award winning' Newsletter, for which Keith deserves our hearty congratulations and our thanks for all the work that he puts into this quarterly publication.

You will have seen a few articles starting to appear in the local press about the Heritage Lottery Fund supported 'Foresters Forest' project; which sets out to unearth, record and promote all that is special about the Forest Of Dean, including the natural heritage (flora and fauna), the archaeological, cultural and built heritage, that makes this triangle of land, between the Severn and Wye, so special. This is made up of a large number of community based projects, on a wide range of themes; which all need to be linked together to tell, and celebrate, the story of our heritage. We have been entrusted, within the programme, the key role of ensuring that the 'historical' context, research and outputs of all the projects is as factually accurate as possible and that 'academic' robustness is maintained. We see this as both advising on research, assisting with compiling and archiving material gathered, checking written material and steering how best the information can be made available to future generations. It is still in the development stages and difficult to predict what this will mean in reality, with regards to workload but we do want you all to be involved in some way, and we would especially like anybody who can make time to assist with this very exciting project to come forward. Please do not hesitate to call me if you want to have a chat about the opportunities.

Finally, whilst on my mission to get people to get involved, I would like to take this opportunity to appeal to you for some assistance. We need your help, we not only need you, the members of this Society, to stand up and take an active role in unearthing, recording and preserving the history of 'The Forest of Dean'. We need you to step forward and help on the Committee that keeps the Society going, that arranges the talks, compiles the 'New Regard', that produces the Newsletter, maintains the website, deals with the various enquiries, correspondence and accounts for the monies (your subscription and donations). We have a strong committee; but we need to plan for succession and we need to ensure there is a turnover of fresh ideas and faces. Don't be shy, step forward and get stuck in!



Update from the Dean Heritage Centre

In Gallery 41 at the moment is artist Sam White's exhibition 'Opium: A Victorian Scandal in Mitcheldean' which will run until Sunday 14th June 2015. This is a fascinating exhibition on a scandal Sam discovered whilst research-

ing her family history which then inspired her to create works of art. This will be followed by the Bream Gardening Society exhibition over the summer. Our current display in our Art Gallery is a needlework display 'The Thread of Life' by artist Sam White. Our next display is the Community Art Exhibition which showcases the talent of local Forest of Dean artists. Our annual hugely popular Fire & Wood Festival will be from 23rd to 25th May this year.

On the Collections front, people continue to kindly donate items to us. Two items I found particularly interesting were letters from woodsmen to the Commissioner of the Woods in the 1880's and a clocking in machine used at a local colliery and then at Five Acres garage. If you would like to donate anything please get in touch with me (contact below). Later in the Spring, we will be displaying the treasure items we purchased last year; the silver posy ring from the 17th century and the Roman coin hoard found in Yorkley. Hearty thanks to all LHS members who contributed.

Nicola Wynn (Nicola@deanheritagecentre.com)

Articles from out of print New Regards are available for download from the FODLHS eshop. To buy an article go to <http://store.forestofdeanhhistory.org.uk> then click on the reprints tab. Members can also order in print issues of the New Regard from the online 'eshop', simply select the 'New Regard' tab at <http://store.forestofdeanhhistory.org.uk/index.php>

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



Photo courtesy of SunGreen.co.uk and Jennifer Jones

The Purple Experiment

I was in the fourth year (I think) at Lydney Grammar School when we were told that we would be taking part in scientific research. In school we trooped upstairs every day to find that in the wide corridor at the top of the stairs, dozens of glasses with measured amounts of Ribena were laid out on long tables awaiting us. We each drank our Ribena daily and that was that. We took it seriously, no fooling about, though I don't remember any teacher supervision. There was also a time when we took pills every day. There were many of them, i.e. ten or twelve, small and white. I have no idea what the pills contained or why we had to take them.

We knew Ribena contained a lot of vitamin C and that it was good for you. Although this took place after the war most of us remembered being organised to collect rose hips to be made into syrup which also contained vitamin C. The Government at that time supplied "welfare" orange juice and, I think, rose hip syrup at clinics for babies and toddlers. It seemed to be thought that if we were all very healthy at the end of the Ribena drinking and pill taking then maybe the Government would supply Ribena in the same way? We all had medical examinations at the end of the research period. We were never told if anything was proven – we were a pretty healthy lot anyway! Ribena never was provided as a welfare drink, but I enjoy it and still drink it regularly.

Sally McGoon

No Pit Props in the Forest of Dean

by Cecile Hunt

As you may know the Society is currently involved in researching the effect of World War One on the Home Front in the Forest of Dean. There have been some surprising discoveries already from this research, including how the whole country came close to not being able to continue with and potentially losing the war due to food and timber shortages.

Here in the Dean we are accustomed to the Forestry Commission managing, very effectively, the woodlands and forest waste of the area. They came into being in 1919 after a Forestry Act had been passed due to the discovery that forestry across the country had been so badly managed previous to World War One.



Before 1914, and during the early years of the war, Great Britain imported wood by the thousands of tons. However by the last couple of years of the war the country was seriously struggling with lack of timber. The beginning of 1915 saw a shortage of wood for pit props for use in the forest collieries, and in other mining areas throughout the country. Britain was importing wood to produce the pit props, and other goods, but at prohibitive prices. By the end of 1915 large quantities of wood was being exported to France from the New Forest and the Forest of Dean for the urgent use by the Expeditionary Force in France as fuel wood. In the Dean a lot of the locally grown wood was used by the Wood Distillation Works in the production of charcoal and acetate of lime both of which were used in the production of munitions of war; also vast amounts of charcoal was sent out for use in the trenches.

In February 1917 the French Government placed two forests in France at the disposal of the Army. This relived the pressure at home; there was now enough timber at home if labour could be found. The main priority, especially in the Dean, was the production of pit props.

In March 1917 a 'Timber Shortage Conference' was held in London. Timber, the largest GB import at £6,000,000 (1917 value) per annum, was now in short supply; it was impracticable to produce that quantity of home grown timber and it was decided that for economy packing cases were to be made thinner and crates substituted with sacking where possible. The Government was to help landowners to produce, cut timber, and place it on the market. By December 1917, here in the Dean and elsewhere, landowners had placed woodlands at the disposal of the country. Home grown timber was becoming more available but labour was still short, this led to the training of hundreds of women in forestry work. They became known as Lumber Gills. It is known that the Dean was used for training Lumber Gills and they worked alongside men in all areas of forestry. They would also have been heavily involved in replanting, especially after the war. It was all kept as quiet as possible by the Government of the day as to how bad the timber shortage was.

It is intended that a book will be produced, by the Society, on the effect of the First World War on the Home Front in the Forest of Dean - it will reveal a lot about what has been forgotten, or kept suppressed, about the wartime era.

The Long Path by Ron Beard

In 2008 I became involved in a post graduate project by Lisa Hill. Lisa was pursuing a study of how the perception of a landscape was influenced by memories and 'hauntings'. To investigate this in a real environment we walked the 'Long Path', "We sought to retrace an old miners' path. Histories of the landscape unfolded as we walked, places rejuvenating old memories, giving them life. Yet they also revealed a haunting sense of loss, a fragmented remembering and forgetting that was unsettled by ghosts from the past..." The walk was extended to take in a part of the former "Lime Tree Ride", (see New Regard 25) and a full account of the venture is contained in Hill, LJ 2014, 'The Long Path: Landscape, Memory and the Spectral'. in: Hilary Orange (ed) *Reanimating Industrial Space*. (Left Coast Press).

Further attempts to follow the path in its entirety were made during Winter 2013 and Spring 2014. On the former date the undergrowth was less of a problem, though fallen leaves still made the path difficult to trace in many places. The Spring walk was aided by the early growth of bluebells which were widespread but were absent from the precise line of the path and made it easier to follow.

The original path probable dates from around 1940 when Lightmoor Colliery was opened. Many miners lived in rows of houses and individual cottages in the Cinderford Bridge area. They quickly made a route through the woods which became known as the "Long Path". In terms of memories and hauntings the most evocative was from memories passed down



The start of 'The Long Path', above the tunnel through which the Soudley Brook flows. Point 'A' on the map above.



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Access to 'The Long Path' is via the bridge over the Soudley Brook along Railway Road in Ruspidge

from former miners who commented that the bobbing lights of the miners' carbide lamps made a beautiful feature as the workers made their way down the steep slope through the trees. My personal memories date from my growing years when as with other children we used the path to go bluebell gathering taking armfuls home to our mothers. At a slightly older age "follow my leader" was a favourite pastime as we climbed the young trees passing, where we dared, from

one tree to another. Later, in my early teens, I made frequent walks with friends or family (my father was a keen walker) accompanied by my sister's Labrador who loved hunting through the undergrowth. We would follow the long path to Lightmoor Colliery where we sought rabbits which burrowed in the dirt mount. After the late fifties, when I left to do National Service, my father continued his walks until the late sixties when access to the start of the path was blocked. The route started from the Bullo Tramway, now Railway Road, across the Bullo to Cinderford railway line then over a fence into the forest. Unfortunately when the railway line closed the track from Cinderford Bridge to lower Ruspidge was sold off. The subsequent owners of the section which was crossed by the long path decided to fence off part of the property preventing access to the forest.

At this time there was no access to the forest from any part of Ruspidge, this led to consternation from the locals and Michael Grindle who had purchased the line near the former Cullamor Bridge gave a part of his property in order that people could gain entry to the woods. A bridge across the Cinderford (Soudley) Brook was needed and this was built by apprentices from the Beachley army depot, and was recently renovated by the Forestry Commission to maintain access.

To describe subsequent changes to the path as it is now it is simplest to consider it in portions, firstly a steep path from Railway Road (A) to the forestry track (B) halfway up the ridge covered by Little Stapledge Wood; from this point over the ridge to the Forestry track (C) from Cinderford Bridge towards Moseley



The junction with the forestry track, at point 'B' on the map above

The Long Path - Continued

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The forestry track from Cinderford Bridge towards Moseley Green, point 'C' on the map

Further attempts to follow the path in its entirety were made during Winter 2013 and Spring 2014. On the former date the undergrowth was less of a problem, though fallen leaves still made the path difficult to trace in many places. The Spring walk was aided by the early growth of bluebells



The line of the old Lightmoor to Cullamoor tramway, point 'D' on the map

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Meetings In Review



On **Saturday 17th January**, approximately 100 members and guests turned out on a cold day to hear Cecile Hunt's excellent talk on **"Workhouses and the New Poor Law in the Forest of Dean"**

Cecile started her talk by explaining that originally relief to the poor had largely been offered by monasteries, and well-to-do households, who would leave scraps of food in the 'dole cupboard' for collection. The dissolution of the monasteries by Henry VIII seriously affected charitable support, and this was not resolved until Elizabethan times when the 'Old Poor Law' was enacted. This created a system administered at parish level paid for by levying rates on rate payers. The unique circumstances of the Forest of Dean, in being extra parochial, meant that towards the end of the 17th century when parish workhouses were established they were scattered around the boundary of the Forest.

In 1832 a Royal Commission was established to investigate the operation of the poor laws. Subsequently in 1834 the Poor Law Amendment Act was passed to implement the changes recommended by the Royal Commission. This law became known as the New Poor Law. The main thrust of the new law was to form together numbers of parishes to form Poor Law Unions. New or adapted workhouses would be built to implement the new regime. Typically 30 parishes would combine to form a Union and the Union Workhouses were physically spaced approximately 20 miles apart. Locally in order to deal with the situation, in July 1842 a bill was passed to provide for the relief of the poor in the Forest of Dean whereby the Forest was split in two (East Dean and West Dean), 'above and below the wood'. Parishes in East Dean were formed into a poor law union based at Westbury on Severn, and parishes in West Dean were associated with the Union Workhouse at Monmouth. The purpose of the new workhouse system was to reduce the costs to the local ratepayers by discouraging the destitute from seeking help by making the workhouse regime oppressive. The poor law system survived, at least in part, until 1948 when the National Health Service was created. Many of the buildings of the Union Workhouses survived to become hospitals or homes for the elderly.

On **Saturday 14th February** some 55 members and guests attended Rose Hewlett's talk **"Living on the Edge"** at the Memorial Hall Drybrook.



Rose delivered a wide ranging and interesting talk focusing on "Farming & Fishing along the Upper Severn Estuary"

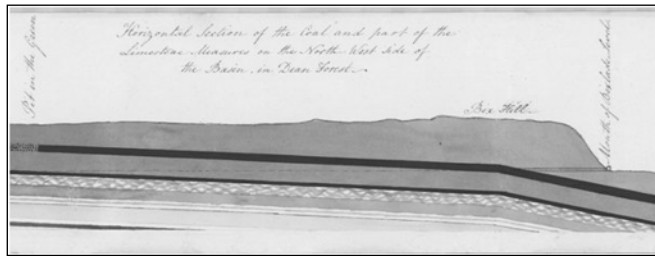
In prehistoric times the River Severn was much wider than it is now, and the low lying riverside lands were covered with forests. By the middle stone age the trees were being cleared by men making use of tools made of bone and antler. Britain eventually became an island, and by the time the Romans invaded the powerful and war like Silurian tribe occupied much of what is now South East Wales extending into West Gloucestershire, whilst on the eastern bank of the Severn

Meetings In Review *continued*

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In prehistoric times the River Severn was much wider than it is now, and the low lying riverside lands were covered with forests. By the middle stone age the trees were being cleared by men making use of tools made of bone and antler. Britain eventually became an island, and by the time the Romans invaded the powerful and war like Silurian tribe occupied much of what is now South East Wales extending into West Gloucestershire, whilst on the eastern bank of the Severn they were faced by the Dubonni tribe. The oldest sea banks from the Roman period can be found at Longney, but there is also reclaimed land attributable to the Romans at Elmore and Arlingham. Focus then switched to historic court cases concerning the river. In 1234 a court case was heard when landowners at Awre protested against the loss of land through river erosion and made



On **Saturday 7th March** a packed West Dean Centre demonstrated the local interest in David Mushet and his association with historic Forest iron and steel production. However the audience were to learn that David Mushet had other little known skills as a geologist.

In her talk entitled **"David Mushet and his Contribution to 'The Map That Changed The World'"** Dr Cherry Lewis took us through this side of his story brilliantly, in a seamless and absorbing way that led to many questions after the talk.

Cherry recently made a serendipitous purchase of a hand-drawn geological cross-section of the Forest of Dean, which turned out to have been created by David Mushet in 1812. The cross section was from Blakeney Bridge to the Little Doward, and the map detailing it is 11 feet long. Research has revealed that 79 other hand made copies of the cross section were created, with copies known to be held by the Geological Society and the National Archives. Mushet also made a vertical section, and also published over 60 articles about geological matters in the Philosophical Magazine.

Prior to this in the late 1700's, William Smith had been observing rock layers and strata for a long time during his work as a surveyor. He came to realise that the strata were arranged in predictable patterns over long distances. He also found that each particular stratum could be identified by the fossils it contained. Later in 1815, using all his knowledge of geology acquired over many years, he published the first geological map of Britain ("the map that changed the world"). John Farey was another important geologist who developed his interest and skills through his work for the Duke of Woburn. He famously made a geological cross section from Ashthorpe in Derbyshire to the east coast at Trusthorpe.

Through her research Cherry was able to show that Mushet knew both Smith and Farey, and how Smith, the 'Father' of English geology, and Mushet, arguably the 'Father' of iron and steel, searched for iron and coal in the Forest of Dean at a time when geology was in its infancy.

Members gathered on **Friday 20th March** to hear Dr Simon Sandall give his lecture titled **"Custom and Popular Memory in the Forest of Dean c1600 – 1832"**. Two episodes in the seventeenth century were first put under the microscope. In 1611 the King gave a grant to the Earl of Pembroke which gave him exclusive access to resources in an area of the Forest of Dean. However, from a contemporary quote we learned that "miners had 'by pretence of title of common and Estovers in the said Forrest' and directly against the terms of the grant, 'taken libertie to themselves to cut down, waste and spoil his Maiesties wood at their will and pleasures'. Later in 1625 a grant of 500 acres at Mailscot was awarded to the Villiers family who originated from Kent. The foresters resented this and on 25th March 1631 a 'band numbered at least five hundred and did march with two Drummes two Coulers and one Fife and in a warlike and outrageous manner did assemble themselves together Armed with gunnes, pykes, halberds and other weapons went into the ground called Mailescott, and there did extreemly beate certain Colliers being in the said Grounds....'. Simon argued that the landscape holds the memory of the historic resistance of the freeminers, and the Dean landscape is a form of memory palace. He gave examples, such as the Scowles which reflected the toil of miners over several centuries. He also pointed out the symbolism associated with the miners, such as the baptismal font at Abenhall Church, and the Freeminers Brass at Newland.

The memory of the earlier struggles would have resonated when in 1831 the Office of Woods declined to open up enclosures twenty years after their creation. Warren James, a freeminer, famously led the resistance to the Crown, but was supported in his views and actions by up to 3000 local people. The freeminers thus historically had a broad base of support for their sense of legitimacy for the continuance of open forests.



David Rice, the Archaeological Curator of Gloucester Museum, was the guest speaker on **Saturday April 11th** when his subject was **'Roman Gloucester'**. Four colonies (colonia) were established by the Romans in England, namely Lincoln, York, Gloucester and Colchester. Gloucester's Roman name was 'Colonia Nervia Glevum' reflecting the fact that the colony was established during the reign of Emperor Nerva. Gloucester was an Imperial City that housed one of

the Roman army legions for a long period. Because of the military association, residents of Gloucester had full rights of Roman citizenship, and the inhabitants would have embraced fully the Roman way of life and culture. The city had huge walls, gates, and the street layout today still reflects to a large extent the Roman street pattern. Much of the Roman archaeology of Gloucester has yet to be discovered, but the remains of a large house were found a few years ago, with a plan similar to high status houses in Pompeii, indicating the importance of Gloucester in Roman times. A corner of the Forum has also been discovered, and it is known that a line of columns were built along the line of Westgate Street. David suggested that the columns might indicate a cryptoporticus (covered walkway), temple or a colonnaded street. Northgate Street was also colonnaded and the columns extended beyond the gate outside the boundaries of the fortifications, but the true extent of the Roman city of Gloucester has yet to be established. David emphasised that we still have much to learn about the Roman occupation of Great Britain. He suggested that the finding of a fifth century Roman coin hoard indicates that Roman civilisation continued in Gloucester for longer than originally believed.

After the usual tea break Cecile Hunt made a short presentation on local Alms Houses, featuring the history of six from an unexpectedly long list.

