



**From
'Overlooking the Wye'
to
'Fixing the Furnace'**

**We celebrate the work of
the OTW team!**



THE FOREST OF
DEAN LOCAL
HISTORY
SOCIETY

News

OCTOBER 2011

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Editors Notes

There have been a number of events this summer organised by the 'Overlooking the Wye' team which members have enjoyed, and some of which are reviewed in this issue. The cover celebrates the outstanding work carried out by the ladies of the 'Overlooking the Wye' team, and shows how their work now encompasses the Whitecliff Furnace, which is currently being conserved under their direction. By the way, if you haven't experienced the Piercefield walks - go now before the trees grow up again and obscure the astonishing views!

Next - an apology to those members who went to the Belle Vue Centre on 10th September to the meeting as advertised on the Membership Card. Unfortunately the management of the Belle Vue Centre changed the use of the meeting room we used there, and it became unavailable to us earlier this year. **A further reminder therefore that the meeting on Saturday 12th November (3pm) that is advertised on the membership card as to be held at Cinderford will now be held at West Dean Centre, Bream.** The Committee is currently reviewing where the Society holds its meetings. If you have a suggestion for a meeting venue please contact Mary Sullivan (see details left).

Last, but certainly not least, I interviewed our new Chair, Cecile Hunt, for this edition of the newsletter, and you can read the interview on the back cover. You will see from the interview and from the AGM Report that the Committee is seeking volunteers for various posts, namely:

New Regard Editorial & Production, Treasurer, Web Site Manager, Outdoor Meetings Officer, and Notice Board Officer.

The Society **URGENTLY** needs help in filling these roles. If you think you can help, or you would like some further information about what the roles entail, please contact Cecile Hunt or Mary Sullivan (details left).

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.

AGM Report

Some 40 members attended the AGM on Saturday 15th October. Outgoing Chairman, Ron Beard, presented his annual report. He reminded members of the Society's representations to the Independent Panel on Forestry, and said that the Society now awaits the publication of the Panel's Preliminary Report due this autumn.

Ron then thanked Averil Kear, who has left the Committee after many years of sterling work. He welcomed Simon Moore to the Committee as Averil's replacement as Conservation Officer. It was then pointed out to the meeting that due to likely changes in roles and people leaving the Committee, there will be vacancies for a new editorial team for the New Regard, vacancy for a Treasurer, and also a need for a new Web Site Manager. Ron asked for immediate help in filling the vacancies, and pointed out that if help from members was not forthcoming, then professional help might have to be sought, with implications for increased costs to the Society. Ron then reviewed the talks and outings, and reminded members that the Society can no longer use the Belle Vue Centre at Cinderford as a meeting place. He reported that at the recent GRCC Local History Afternoon members Eric Nicholls and Roger Deeks had been awarded the Bryan Gerrard Award for the best article in a journal in Gloucestershire.

Ron then extended his thanks to the members of the Committee for their support during his term of office as Chairman.

Keith Walker read the Treasurers Report on behalf of Cecile Hunt who was not able to attend the meeting. In the report Cecile pointed out that the basic cost of running the Society was currently not covered by the income from membership fees, and she reminded members that membership fees have increased from 1st October to £10 for a single membership and £15 for a couple living at the same address. Members paying by standing order were asked to vary the amount paid to cover the increased fees. There has been increased income from teas (£163 this year) and from the draw (£302 this year), but increased lecturers fees, hall hire fees and general overheads have added to the shortfall. However Cecile added that overall the Society has very healthy bank balances and the Society as a whole continues to run efficiently and effectively. Mary Sullivan was elected as Vice Chair, and she then conducted the elections for Society Officers. Full details of the new Committee will be published in the next Newsletter.



Membership News

May I remind members that their subscriptions for the year 2011/2012 are now due? As agreed at the last AGM, subs are now £10 for one member, £15 for 2 or more at the same address, and £15 for overseas members. Please could those members who are paying by standing order alter their instructions to their banks accordingly? Some members are still paying standing orders at the (very) old amount of £6!

We would like to welcome the following new members to the Society:

Mr D Carter, Cornwall

Mr & Mrs D & J Schafer, Whitchurch

Mrs M & Miss J Kelly & Mr A Matthews, Churcham.

Introducing Simon Moore - our New Conservation Officer



I am Simon Moore, I live in Lydney with my Wife and Daughter, I have always lived in the Forest and have no plans to live anywhere else. I grew up in Drybrook, went to the village school and then to the Royal Forest of Dean Grammar School at Five Acres. My Fathers parents' were farmers in Drybrook, he is one of 9 Children, so I have lots of relatives in the Forest area! My Mother is from Cinderford. My Maternal grandfather worked in the pits, finishing at Eastern, where due to ill health he looked after the pit ponies, my Grandmother was head cook at Bilson school.

I am a Chartered Building Surveyor and a member of SPAB (Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings). I have been self-employed since 1997, I have vast experience of domestic and small commercial buildings, and have worked on numerous Listed Buildings. I have worked in most parts of the Forest in my career and have a good working knowledge of the subtle differences in character between the various areas and villages within the 'Forest'.

I am both delighted and daunted to have been asked to take on the role of the society's Conservation Officer, delighted as I have a good working knowledge of building and the use of traditional materials and methods, I have a passion for buildings; their design, use and their settings, which I would like to share. I feel that it is important to record and understand what is left of our past, to conserve and retain what is important and to educate people as to what they would otherwise have over-looked. I am daunted to be taking over from Averil Kear; who has so much knowledge and information about the history of the Forest at her finger tips, and so much experience at persuading people to respect our built heritage. With the loss of the Local Authority's Conservation Officer, the general Public has lost the ability to get good quality initial advice on the correct way to 'conserve' the historic buildings in the Forest, and I would hope that part of my role will be steering members of the public in the right direction. So please do not hesitate to contact me should you wish to discuss any listed building, or historical structure related matter.

Simon Moore

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“Tin Huts”

Steve Cooper and Roger Deeks are compiling a database of all the old Iron buildings, those made of corrugated metal, in the Forest of Dean and would be grateful for your help in compiling a full list. They would appreciate it if you could send them the names and function (i.e., Church, village hall, club etc.,) of any buildings in your locality with a post code or location. Ideally they would be interested in any associated history of the building including when it was built. They would welcome as many responses as possible to achieve a comprehensive list.

Please contact: steveandnade@tiscali.co.uk,
or roger.nedstop@btinternet.com,

(telephone) 01594560304
(telephone) 01594517053.

Book Reviews



Vicky Harper with Lydney Mayor Bill Osborne at the book launch

Lydney Memories by Barbara Steele, edited by Vicky Harper

Perhaps some of our older members will remember Barbara Steele, formerly Yeatman, from her time teaching at Viney Hill School, but more likely from her contributions to the local newspaper, for which she wrote about her memories of growing up in Lydney in the years between the wars. Barbara died in 2005, aged nearly 90, and when her daughter, Vicky Harper, came across a collection of her writings, she decided to edit and publish them, in memory of her mother. She dedicates the book to the late Melville Watts, a great friend of her mothers and proceeds from sales will go to the Friends of Lydney Hospital.

We are indebted to Vicky as well as to Barbara for bringing us a picture of a very different life in our town to that we know today. The Yeatman's had an outfitters shop in Lydney High Street, but lived at the far end of the town, from where she recounts that they could 'just pass the old cowshed and climb a wooden gate' to be in the open country – I think it must be where Lakeside is today. She talks of Lydney Docks, still in its working heyday and with shops and houses lining the quay, which again, older members may just remember. It would be instructive to take a tour of Lydney, with Barbara's writings in hand to see how much had disappeared and what, if anything, still remains.

Barbara's writings paint a picture of halcyon days that we seem to have lost, from which older people can indulge their nostalgia and perhaps younger ones may learn something, so we must thank Vicky for bringing her mother's memories to our attention; and the best bit is that this is volume one, so there is more to follow.

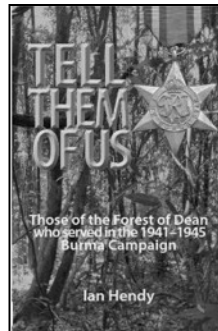
Christine Martyn.

'Lydney Memories' is sold in aid of Friends of Lydney Hospital, and can be obtained from Inspirations, 1, Hill St., Lydney and from the Chepstow Book Shop, price £4.

'Tell Them of Us' by Ian Hendy

The title of this book was taken from the inscription engraved on the stone at the Kohima War Cemetery in Burma 'When you go home, tell them of us and say, 'For your tomorrow, we gave our today'. As befits a history teacher, Ian Hendy gives the background to the Burma campaign and I can do no better than to review his book in the words of his publisher, Doug Maclean.

'The 1941-1945 Burma Campaign was one of the most gruelling military operations of World War Two. It is notorious for the inventive tactics used by Britain and her Allies as well as for the atrocious conditions that had to be endured by the troops. This is the story of those of the Forest of Dean who served in Burma, some who came home and some who did not.



There are memories and personal accounts of battles, jungle warfare, comradeship, humour and tragedy. There are stories too, of lasting friendships that began in Burma where men from the Forest would find joy in greeting, 'ow bist owd' but' when encountering a fellow Forester. And when they returned, they set up the Forest of Dean Burma Star Association. Sadly, but inevitably, that Association was finally disbanded in 2005, sixty years after Victory over Japan (VJ) Day. This book will serve as a record and play a part in preserving their memories for today's and future generations.'

Doug Maclean.

Tell Them of Us: Those of the Forest of Dean who served in the 1941-1945 Burma Campaign ISBN 0946252824 Price £12.99 from all good book sellers.



Voices for the Vote – Shire Hall – and the Story of Chartism in South Wales

Measuring 21cm. x 21cm. this new book is brimful with illustrations, engravings, maps, modern photographs, and cartoons.

Ruth Waycott and her editorial team have truly trawled the Chartist archives. No Gallery, Library, Museum or Heritage Centre has remained unvisited

in their unrelenting search for new material. This remarkable compilation is a great credit to the team's endeavours. Under the intellectual leadership of Wales' eminence grise of Chartism, Les James of Newport University, this 64 page booklet goes to the very top of the growing pile of modern day books about the People's Charter. Now, Monmouth is proud of its central role in the shameful Show Trial of 1839-40. Even the late, great historian of Monmouth, Keith E. Kissack, spoke sub-voce of Chartism because he knew that Monmouth once viewed the Chartists as persona non grata.

This splendid booklet, for the first time, goes into detail on who-was-who at the Monmouth Trial. The legal jargon of the time is fully explained, and the tone is never patronising. The so called Newport Rising is closely examined and yet politely leaves us to make up our own minds about its significance. The Government of the day had no doubts and therefore the last mass trial for high treason ever to take place in Britain swung into operation.

But, why oh why, were 22 left dead in front of the Westgate Hotel with possibly 50 or more seriously injured? The highest number of fatalities ever "accomplished" in a civil disturbance in mainland Britain. What had John Frost and the other leaders intended? Although Frost lived until 1877, dying in his 93rd. year, his autobiography was never written, no explanation of his intentions in November, 1839, was ever forthcoming.

David Harrison

Voices for the Vote – Shire Hall – and the Story of Chartism in South Wales Price £4.99 available from Shire Hall Monmouth ISBN-10: 0956874509

PLAQUES & MONUMENTS



In this edition we are focusing on a monument which was not erected by the Forest of Dean Local History Society, and which has something of an air of mystery about it! Thanks to member Daphne Lane for information about 'Reform Bridge'!

'Reform Bridge' is located to the south of Speech House Lake (OS coordinates 362781 210860), as detailed on the map below. The 1831 Ordnance Survey Map shows a track running through the Forest between Parkend and Yew Tree Brake, and the bridge is located on this track. The name 'Reform Bridge' is not marked on the 1831 OS map, but does appear on later OS maps of 1880 and 1890.



Why is the bridge marked on the later maps as 'Reform Bridge'? Look at the photograph, above right, which was taken by the late Bob Godfrey in 1988. You can see that the northern arch of the bridge has a commemorative stone marked 'Reform 1833'. It was discovered by Bob Godfrey when he cleared the adjacent pond. Remarkably the stone cannot be seen from the track passing over the bridge, and today vegetation once again totally obscures it.

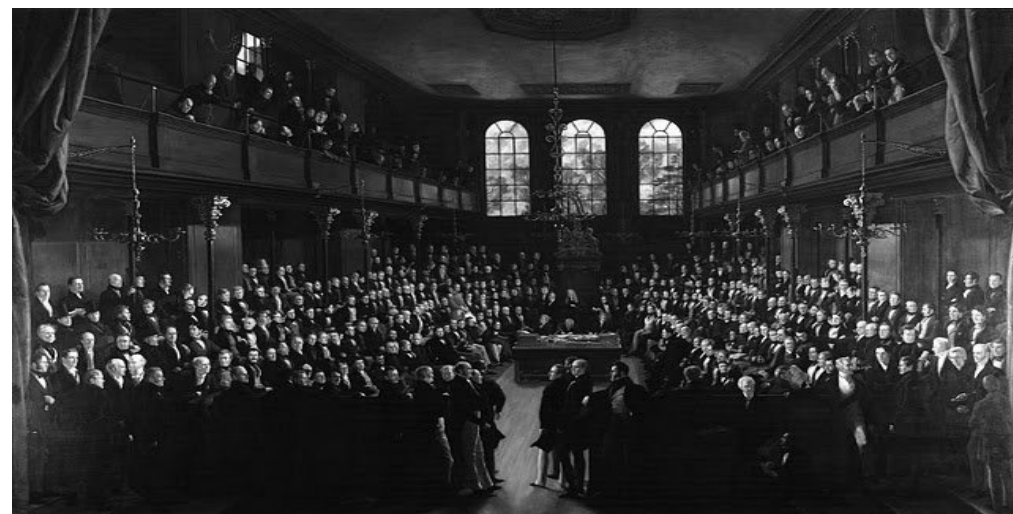
Note that the stone is not marked 'Reform Bridge 1833', so presumably the memorial marks something other than the construction of the bridge. So what happened in 1833 which might account for the stone?



Locally, by 1833, Thomas Sopwith had started surveying woodland, noting encroachments and enclosures. The Dean Forest Riots took place in 1831, and as a consequence the Dean Forest Commission Act was passed in Parliament. It provided the appointment of a Commission to look into; the boundaries of and encroachments in the Forest, the rights and privileges claimed by the Free Miners and their Mine Law Court, the Court and prison of St Briavels, and the parochialisation of the Forest. The Commission was already sitting by 1833, and ultimately produced five reports during a three year period.

It seems much more likely that the commemorative stone marks the passing of the 1832 Great Reform Act. The Act brought major changes to the electoral system in Britain, increasing the number of people who could vote from 478,000 to 813,000, in a total population of 24 million. Universal suffrage was still a long way off, as no women were allowed to vote, and the ability to vote relied on ownership of land. The lack of representation under the Act for the working class ultimately led to the development of the Chartist Movement. As a result of the Reform Act of 1832, West Gloucestershire was created as a Parliamentary Constituency, and returned two Members of Parliament, both Liberals (Whigs).

Sir George Hayter's painting "The House of Commons, 1833" (below) commemorates the passing of the Great Reform Act in 1832 and shows some of the newly elected Members of Parliament at their first session on 5 February 1833.



Meetings In Review

Bixslade Tramroad Trail



On Sunday 10th July, some 20 members joined Chairman Ron Beard in an exploration of Bixslade industrial archaeology heritage, using the History Society's 'Bicslade Tramroad Trail' leaflet as a guide. Starting from the Stoneworks at Cannop Ponds, the party climbed up the old tramroad to Union Pit where the monument was admired. On then to Monument Mine, currently being worked by three freeminers. One of them, Rich Daniels, was waiting to describe how the mine operates. He explained that the drift extends some 200 metres down from the surface, and the headings, from which the coal is taken, are driven at right angles from the main passage. The coal being worked is the two feet six inches high Yorkley seam. The seam is undercut using a mechanised coal cutter, afterwards the miner lies on his back or side to work the coal free. The coal is then loaded onto drams for haulage to the surface. Rich Daniels then demonstrated how the drams are brought to the surface and emptied onto the mechanised coal sorter. Members who have open fires at home might like to note that the coal produced is sold directly to the public from the pithead.

Leaving Monument Mine, the party moved on up Bixslade, stopping to investigate the Low and High Level mines along the way. Vice President Ian Standing was also with the tour, and he supplied hand outs which gave further details of the geology and chronology of the mines and quarries in Bixslade. Finally reaching the top of Bixslade, the party explored the extensive workings of Bixshead Quarry. The Quarry is still producing large quantities of stone which are transported for working down to the Stoneworks at Cannop Ponds, (but not by the original tram road route!). The walk then continued downhill via Knob Quarry and Pheonix mine to finish back at Cannop Ponds.

For those of you who missed the walk, the Bicslade Tramroad Trail leaflet is being reprinted and will be available for purchase at meetings and via the website (www.forestofdeanhistory.org.uk).

GRCC Local History Committee Regional Meeting, Fairford, Saturday, 2 July 2011

Every year there are two occasions on which we can join with local history enthusiasts from all around the county and have an enjoyable day at a GRCC event – the July event and the themed history October afternoon. This year's summer event was hosted by Fairford local history group. I went along, knowing little about Fairford other than it's near a big RAF base. But I learnt there is much more to the place. We started with a half hour introductory talk about the long history of the village. Local archaeological searches have found remains of human occupation going back to a Saxon village and cemetery right up to nowadays. Always an agricultural area, the population declined at the time of the industrial revolution and has since maintained a level of about 3000 souls.



Groups were then escorted around the village by a local member of the local history society and told about the buildings as we passed them. The village has many charming old houses and cottages, a mill, an intriguing oxpen, common land and a beautiful church, St Marys, with a stunning, near complete set of medieval glass windows. Our explorations done, we returned to the Community hall, a beautifully refurbished old school, to enjoy endless cups of tea and very tasty cakes

Sadly, only 4 people from FoDLHS attended but we had an excellent visit and a chance to hear about the activities of other societies. The meeting next July will be hosted by Maisemore local history group, so much nearer to home for us. Look out for details in future newsletters.

Mary Sullivan, General Secretary & GRCC Rep.

Wye Valley Tour - Overlooking the Wye

On a very hot day in July, FODLHS members were taken on a tour of the Wye Valley by Kate Biggs from the Overlooking the Wye Scheme. First of all we were taken to see the restored water wheel at Abbey Mill, Tintern. The old water wheel was made around 1870 and stopped on 22nd March 1951, electricity taking over from water powered energy. Abbey Mill, now some 860 years old, played an important part in the Industrial history of Tintern and the Angiddy Valley. Formerly a corn mill to Tintern Abbey, later an iron-wire works and lastly a wood turnery and sawmill.



Kate Biggs & FODLHS members at Angiddy Furnace

We went on to visit a restored limekiln above Tintern which together with the associated quarry area are a scheduled ancient monument. The rock faces of the quarry were very impressive and some interpretation boards had been erected which showed clearly the workings of the lime kilns in the past.

Kate then took us up the Angiddy Valley to the Angiddy Furnace. This site represents early industrial development, dating back to the mid-16th century, when the Angiddy valley was chosen as the location for a new ironworks due to the availability of water power, charcoal (from the surrounding woodland) and local iron ore. The Angiddy furnace was built in 1650 and only ceased production in 1826. The Angiddy ironworks provides a fascinating example of early iron production and has historic significance as part of the South Wales iron industry, which provided most of the pig (or cast) iron in Britain in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries. FODLHS members were shown the improvements achieved by the Overlooking the Wye scheme particularly cutting back the vegetation, conserving the remaining furnace structures and installing some excellent interpretation boards.

After an excellent lunch at the old Station at Tintern we rounded off our day with a visit to The Eagle's Nest a spectacular viewpoint, high above the Wye at Wyndcliff, looking out over the sweeping curve of the river around the Lancaut Peninsula with views down to Chepstow Castle and the distant River Severn. The Wyndcliff was, in effect, the start (or finish) of Valentine Morris's Piercefield Walk, the highest point on the walk with the grandest view. Coleridge, one of the Romantic poets, described the Wyndcliff view as "*the whole world imaged in its vast circumference*".

Averil Kear

Meetings In Review

On Saturday, 10th September, Dr. Liz Whittle of C.A.D.W. spoke on **Piercefield and its picturesque landscape**. 19 members and 5 committee members comprised an appreciative audience for Liz. Occasionally, the sun shone brightly obscuring the projected slides in a hall with insufficient black-out, but the speaker's personality rose to the challenge.

Piercefield House dates back to Tudor times but today's remains mostly reveal the work of Sir John Soane. Our allies, the Americans, subjected the decaying ruin to friendly fire as target practice in World War Two. Valentine Morris inherited the estate in 1743 and invested in landscaping the grounds in the manner which we may still observe today. The necessary money for these improvements came from the West Indies in the form of the sugar plantations and the slave trade. Today, sections of the cantilevered staircase, the coach house, stable block, kitchen garden, ice house and servants' cottages show the remains of the 18th. century grandeur.

Liz concentrated, however, on the out-of-doors and the picturesque. The network of engineered Walks throughout the grounds were breathtaking with steep, even vertiginous drops and spectacular views. The grand Ha-Ha designed to keep the stock from roaming into the gardens and the hydraulic pump remain. The strange Cold Bath, complete with corner fireplace, was provided for naked 18th century gentlemen, and placed strategically a long way from the House. Frissons of a different kind were laid out for those indefatigable Wye Valley Tourists who craved a landscape with a view, one that appeared suddenly and unexpectedly was best.

Monmouth's historian, Charles Heath, after his visit described the splendid Giant's Cave with its view of Lancaut, sadly the Giant's statue fell, a victim of the frost. Even cannons were fired from mounts so that the effect of the echo could be enjoyed by the visitor. Well above the very muddy Wye, Gilpin in 1770, with others, popularised the Druids' Circle, the enormous Beech Tree, the sparkling crystal Grotto and the viewpoints where tree clearance today has improved the vista. Many present had climbed to the Eagle's Nest and after Liz's tour de force of the other delights at Piercefield, look forward to venturing further, perhaps when the Walks Trails leaflet is published.

David J. Harrison

Frank Harris Photographic Archive



The fine photograph of a ship at Lydney Docks is just one of a series of photographs and negatives taken by the late Frank Harris (photographer of Lydney). The collection of photographs was recently given to Gloucester Archive (via our own Averil Kear), by Mrs Christine Thomas of Alvington who is a relative of Frank Harris.

The collection is now viewable at Gloucestershire Archive under reference number D12443. Included are photographs & negatives of Lydney & Aylburton & surrounding areas, including: the train station, ferry, harbour, the old picture house, co-op store, tin works, Pine End works, etc.

An Interview with our new Chair - Cecile Hunt

Ed: Cecile, I believe that you are a Forester, can you let us know a few details about your family history and your family's relationship with the Forest?



I was not born a Forester but I am a part bred Forester. I was born in Surrey; and in 1959 with my two older brothers, Graham and Paul, Mum, Violet Croad nee Worgan and Dad Walter Croad we came to live at Lower Oldcroft, Nr Lydney. My Father's family came mainly from London and the Isle of Wight; but Mum had been born on Littledean Hill in 1915, whilst her father George Worgan was serving in France during WWI. Grandad, George Worgan was seriously injured at Ypres and eventually came home to a cottage Granny had rented at Soudley Mill, now the Dean Heritage Centre.

Ed: How do you believe the Society has changed since it achieved Charity status?

Since the Society became a charity it has gone from strength to strength. Charity status has helped it to fulfil two high profile projects; The Miners Memorial and the GeoMap. Being accountable to the Charity Commission has meant that the society has had to become more professional in how it is run and draws up its yearly reports; this helps the society to continuously broaden its outlook year on year.

Ed: As you start your time as Chair, are there specific goals you want to achieve

Going forward, and building on the firm base laid by previous chairmen and women, I would like to try and get younger people more involved with the history and the heritage that surrounds them in the Forest. I would also like to see more members bringing their knowledge and expertise of history out into the open more; perhaps getting involved with past and future projects more and not being afraid to contribute articles to their quarterly newsletter and the New Regard.

Ed: Are there any immediate challenges you face as Chair

I am starting my term as Chair with a very strong and dedicated committee but some of the positions on the committee are crying out for volunteers. One of the main positions, due to me moving into the Chairman seat is Treasurer – and here I appeal to our members! Is there anybody out there who would like to give it a go? If you are teetering on the edge of volunteering let me know and I will run through the not very onerous jobs it entails.

Other positions that need filling are Notice Board Officer; Outdoor Meetings Officer and New Regard editor and assistant. You will not be left on your own to manage these posts; there is a lot of experience waiting to help anyone who volunteers for any of these posts. Help your society to continue to be vibrant and active, please consider joining us on your committee – we don't bite – become one of the dedicated team that strives to steer your society ever forward!