

Annual report Abergavenny Local History Society January 1st to 31st December 2017

The objects of Abergavenny Local History Society (charity registration number 1098582) are:

1. To promote the local community's knowledge of and interest in history
2. To provide local historical and general interest information for visitors
3. To support Abergavenny Museum and Castle

Achievements to meet these objects

1. During 2017 the society members attended lectures on: The Story of Middleton Hall, Carmarthenshire; Famous & Forgotten Women in Wales; Priests, Poetry & Purgatory in Late Medieval Wales; Amy Dillwyn, Suffragist & Pioneering Industrialist; Archaeology of Upland Gwent; Victorian Brass Bands & the Industrial Revolution especially in Wales; Celtic Myths in Medieval Wales; and Women in Agriculture in the 1860s from the report on Gwent.

During the summer months, visits to places of historic interest included: guided tours of Brockhampton, Ledbury and Kempley churches; guided tours of Margam Abbey and Aberdulais Tin Works; a weekend to Derbyshire visiting Buxton, Haddon Hall, Eyam, Castleton and the Derwent Valley; and an industrial history visits to Monmouth railways and Tintern iron working sites.

The newsletter included short reports on the visits of the previous year for those unable to attend. It included articles on Abergavenny (Llanfoist) Bridge, 'Booze & Baccy in WW1', information about the setting up of a group to support and investigate the historic Gunter Mansion in Cross Street with its hidden Catholic chapel, and two reports on recent important archaeological finds in Wales – Mesolithic footprints at Port Eynon on the Gower and possible traces of Henry VII's birthplace at Pembroke castle.

2. To provide information about local history to visitors and more widely, the research group completed the review of historical documentation from the First World War and a long article summarising the findings will appear in the Gwent Local History Journal in Spring 2018. The research group continue to work on recording the gravestones in Old Hereford Road Cemetery and exploring ways to remove the overgrowth of trees and vegetation obscuring many graves after attempting some clearance themselves. The Abergavenny Street Survey (www.abergavennystreetsurvey.co.uk) continues to be updated with information received or obtained. The research group had previously contributed to an initial survey of historical sources for Gunter Mansion and several members have continued to support the work as part of a Gunter History group. Anyone who is interested in doing some local history investigation is welcome to join the research group and will receive support as needed.

The society continued to support the Abergavenny Eisteddfod with a donation and the chairman announced and presented the literary prizes. This year we have changed the system for the History Award of £200 given to pupils going on to study history at University. It had been noted that many students now changed schools to study at A level and local students

might attend any of the schools or sixth form colleges in the area. We agreed to change the criteria to 'any local student' rather than limit it to King Henry VIII comprehensive school. We wrote to all the schools and colleges in the area with A level students to inform them and asked for written applications from the students explaining why they thought they should receive the awards and confirmation from the school or college that they were supported in the application. We received two applications: from Kathryn (Katie) Davies and Rhys Gilson. We already knew Katie as she had worked with the research group on the Street Survey. Both applications explained well their interests in history and their future aspirations and we had no difficulty in giving both an Award which were presented to them in December by the Chairman.

Once a week, the society organises and provides a human presence in St Mary's Priory Church which contains one of the best collections of monuments in the country. This provides information about the collection and its links to the local history to visitors and local people. We do, however, need more volunteers for Wednesday afternoons.

A revised leaflet for the Trail around the ceramic plaques (Wigs, Flannels, Normans & Romans) was printed with more than half of the cost being donated by the Abergavenny & District Tourist Association. This free leaflet in the series Trails & Tales has been very popular over the summer tourist season. Two further leaflets – 'Parks & Gardens' and 'Chapels & Churches' are in preparation for next year's tourist season.

Members continue to receive emails notifying them about events of historical interest in the area as well as information about the activities of the society.

The society continues to provide information to the wider public via the website: www.abergavennylocalhistorysociety.co.uk from where guided walks can be downloaded or leaflets or books requested. Information about the society activities is available. Visitors can attend lectures free (although we do ask for a donation). Links to other societies of relevance are also provided and there is a query page where questions about local history can be collected. Answers are provided or the question passed onto other bodies who may be able to assist. The annual report and financial reports will be made available on the website.

3. The Castle and Museum continue to be floodlight during the evenings of September to April and sponsorship is sought from members towards the cost of maintenance and electricity, although most of this comes out of the main account. The Victorian Garden in the Castle grounds, maintained by members, continues to attract many compliments from visitors.

New displays have been created in the Museum and opening hours have been changed to reflect the greater demand for Sunday and lunchtime opening.

Members of the society volunteer at the Museum and the society is supportive of the intention of the Museum service to provide an Events Pavilion in the grounds to provide a covered space for activities. It is hoped this will encourage appropriate use of the Castle grounds and provide some much needed income for the Museum service. As part of this, the society provided part of the funds for a geophysical exploration of the area opposite to the Castle Lodge house to ensure that no archaeological remains would be disturbed by the building of the structure.

President: Ken Key

Committee Members (with their main responsibilities) who were confirmed at the AGM in May were:

Chairman: G Wakley. **Secretary:** J Cormack, **Assistant secretary:** M Senior. **Treasurers:** B Hurley until January 2017, A Ward until November 2017, November 2017 onwards: co-opted member D Stein.

Lecture Secretary: H Morgan, **Assistant Lecture Secretary:** J Sweeting

Membership Officer: J Patrick, **Deputy Membership/ Website and email notifications/ Research Group co-ordinator:** S Smith

Floodlighting: H. Buchanan

Visits administration: C Fairclough

Publications: I Hofayz

Publicity: D Phillips

Schools Liaison & refreshments: J White

Refreshments: J Butt

Other committee members: M Kelly, D Morgan

Monmouthshire Museums nominated representative: R Rogers

The committee have decided that they no longer meet formally each month before each lecture, as most business can be conducted by email or phone. They will continue to meet formally in February, April, September and November with any additional meetings as required.

Many thanks to all for their hard work throughout the year, including those, not on the committee, who assist by running the projector at meetings, gardening with Paddy Beynon in the Museum Garden, researching and being on the rota for church watch.

Dr G Wakley Chairman