

# FOREST OF DEAN LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

*news*  
May 2022

Inside:

- Book your summer trips & walks
- Tolkien's Fantasy & The King With the Magic Hand
- Childhood Memories of the Forest During WWII
- Forest Officials Through Time

The Forest of Dean  
Local History  
Society

# News

May 2022

**Editor:**

Keith Walker  
51 Lancaster Drive  
Lydney  
GL15 5SJ  
01594 843310

[NewsletterEditor@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk](mailto:NewsletterEditor@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk)

**Chair:**

John Lane  
07890260416

[Chair@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk](mailto:Chair@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk)

**Treasurer:**

Chris Sullivan  
01594 860197

[Treasurer@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk](mailto:Treasurer@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk)

**Secretary:**

Nicola Wynn  
01594 860834

[Secretary@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk](mailto:Secretary@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk)

**Website:**

[forestofdeanhistory.org.uk](http://forestofdeanhistory.org.uk)

Registered Charity  
No: 1094700

Printed by  
Inky Little Fingers

## Editor's Notes

The front cover photograph is of St Michael's Church, Garway, Herefordshire. It is one of only six churches built in England by the Knight's Templar, and you have the chance to visit it as part of the Societies 'Summer Walks & Trips Programme'. Full details of the three summer events can be found in the 'News' section of this edition. Early booking is advised for all of the events as they are sure to be popular, and numbers are limited!

It is always gratifying to receive correspondence as editor of this newsletter. Well known local historian and member John Belcher wrote to me to take me to task for a line in the last newsletter which 'repeated the myth that JR Tolkien was inspired by the Forest of Dean in his research for his fantasy novels', adding that 'there is no firm evidence that Tolkien ever visited the Forest of Dean'. John went on to say that 'Tolkien's connection with the Forest came when he was called upon by Sir Mortimer Wheeler in 1928/9, to research and interpret the origins of the little-known God Nodens, to whom the 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD temple in Lydney Park was dedicated. Wheeler was excavating the site properly for the first time and naturally turned to Tolkien, who was Professor of Anglo Saxon (old English) at Oxford University and a person of immense knowledge of the histories and myths of ancient peoples and cults. He wrote a short history of the origins of Nodens, which was included in Wheeler's final report to the Society of Antiquities of London, his Sponsors.' I am glad to stand corrected, particularly as John has kindly supplied an article which explains all in the centre pages.

On the back cover you will find the first of a two part series written by Ron Beard about his childhood memories of the Forest during and after WW2. Ron documented these memories for his grandson, but I am sure many of you will also have your memory cells tickled by his words.

*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.*

**Photo attribution:**

Front cover Garway Church Photo © Jonathan Thacker (CC BY-SA 2.0)  
News section Mitcheldean Town Hall Photo © Jaggery (CC BY-SA 2.0)

# Views From The Chair



Greetings to all members, especially new members who have joined us recently.

At long last, there are signs of Spring and improved weather ahead. The changing of the clocks always heralds longer days and lighter evenings and with our last indoor meeting done and dusted for the year, we can all look forward to a summer of outdoor meetings. In particular, I am looking forward to hosting Leckhampton History Society in July on a reciprocal visit. Details of the walk will be circulated nearer the time.

Our indoor meetings have continued to be popular, despite the natural nervousness of some members to attend gatherings, and we have noticed the numbers attending have been steadily rising, which is a really positive sign. It will be good to get back to pre-pandemic numbers though.

It is heartening to know that my contribution to the Newsletter is actually read by the membership! As proof, following my appeal in the February newsletter for someone to help with the website, Lewis Weager has kindly stepped forward and is already previewing the content and style of the website, with a view to updating the site. Many thanks Lewis, we, the committee, are extremely grateful to you.

Hot on the heels of the hugely successful *Story of the Forest*, Andy Seed has produced a follow up, *The Wildlife of the Forest*. It is written in the same style as the first book, and, similarly, is an invaluable resource for children and adults alike. Get your copy soon!

Both books were written under the auspices of the Foresters Forest lottery funded project which was so ably coordinated by our own Vice Chair, Sue Middleton who was, as I'm sure you are all aware, elected as Verderer at the beginning of March. Huge congratulations to Sue on her historic appointment.

I have always been fascinated by place names and their origins. Sometimes, the source of the name can be fairly obvious - Lydbrook, for example. But there are those that, at first glance, defy interpretation, Awre, Bullo and Cannop are but three which require a degree of research to establish their origins. I am sure there is an article for the Newsletter or even New Regard crying to be written. Any volunteers??

In a similar vein, local dialect has always intrigued me. Having been brought up on the Cotswolds I grew up with an elderly grandfather who sometimes spoke a completely different language. Something that will be familiar to any 'newcomer' to the Forest of Dean I'm sure.

Language is constantly evolving (not necessarily for the better) but there are some wonderfully prosaic figures of speech which my grandfather, and others, used in their everyday conversations. Many of them have now all but disappeared so I thought I would list a few here:

Adry = Thirsty  
Blather = To talk indistinctly  
Butty = Comrade, mate  
Daddocky = Rotten (as in wood) - my favourite!  
Fromward = Opposite of toward

There are many others, perhaps if there is enough interest it might form an irregular item in the newsletter.

May I wish you all a wonderful summer and I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at our outdoor meetings

*John Lane*



## MEMBERSHIP

This is my first Newsletter since becoming membership secretary, and I will already have met many of you at Society meetings and outings. Thank you all for being so welcoming and for the support I have received from the Committee.

As I write this, I have just returned from my first trip out this year to an Historic House and Garden, a particular interest of mine, and I hope the warmer weather will now allow us all to enjoy more time outside.

New members have increased steadily since the last newsletter, and I would like to extend a warm welcome to Derek Jones, Sarah Matthews, Pamela Bruce, Gregory Jones, Paul and Lesley Ramm, Gillian Smith, Ted Wilson, Robert Lloyd, and William Parker.

Please let me know if you change your postal or email address, especially important so I can send out timely reminders for Society events, or other information which becomes available after the newsletter has been published.

Ian Gower ([membership@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk](mailto:membership@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk))



## SUMMER TRIPS & WALKS

### A WALK TO DISCOVER ANCIENT & NOTABLE TREES – Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> June

This **guided walk** explores some of the ancient and notable trees found around Steam Mills and Nailbridge, led by Paul Rutter.

The route is approximately 2.5km long, exploring a path with mostly gentle sloping ground. Starting and finishing at the same point, at the green near Steam Mills primary school. A reasonable level of fitness will be needed to complete this approximately two and a half hours walk, along with sturdy and appropriate footwear.

Please email Sue Middleton ([vicechair@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk](mailto:vicechair@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk)) or call **07973 789214** to book a place. Places are limited to 24 walkers.

Please arrive by 9.45am so that we can start punctually at 10am and please wear sturdy walking boots and clothing appropriate for the weather on the day.



*Walk leader Paul Rutter made a career in wildlife and conversation for over 50 years. Recently retired from working for Plantlife as their Woodland Biodiversity Adviser, and a project leader with the Foresters' Forest project.*

## VISIT TO GARWAY CHURCH AND DOVECOT – Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> July – 1’30pm

An extra **self-drive** trip out is now available for up to 24 members.

St Michael's Church, Garway. **The earliest record of a monastery here is in 615 AD, but it was with the arrival of the Knights Templar in 1180 that the history of the church at Garway becomes clearer.** The Templars built a number of partly round churches (copying the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem) including this one.



*Knight Hospitaller*

On **Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> July** there will be the opportunity for a conducted tour of Garway Church and dovecot, built in 1323 by the Knights Hospitallers, with refreshments to follow in the local village hall. Cost for tour and refreshments is **£10 per person.**

Parking is available in the village car park with a walk of a few hundred yards to the Church.

Meet at the car park at 1.30pm for a 2pm tour.

Those who wish can also look around nearby Orcop Church at about 12.30pm. This will be uncondacted.

If you wish to go on the trip please contact Mary Sullivan on **publications@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk** or call or text **07976 631547.**

Once your place is assured you will be asked to pay. If possible, please pay by bank transfer to HSBC, a/c in name of The Forest of Dean Local History Society, sort code 40-18-05, account number 11071963. Please include your name as reference if paying by BACS.

Otherwise send a cheque (but this does have a cost to the Society now) to: Mary Sullivan, Forge House, Forge Hill, Lydbrook, GL17 9QS.

---

## A WALKING TOUR OF MITCHELDEAN - Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2pm

On **Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> July** there will be an opportunity for a conducted walking tour of the historic village of Mitcheldean. There is no charge for the tour, and there will be a break for refreshments during the tour in return for a voluntary donation, proceeds of which will go to FODLHS.

The tour will include many of the historic buildings (or remains of) within the village, (St. Michael and All Angels Church, Town Hall, Wintle's Brewery, Jovial Colliers building, George Hotel, Lamb Inn, Cottrell's coaches, Elizabethan Barn, Rank Xerox, Platts Row, and many more), and will cover some sites that have appeared in previous articles in the New Regard.

Free Parking is available in the car park behind the library in the centre of the village. GL17 0SJ, off Brook Street.

Meet in front of the library at 1.45pm for a 2pm tour.

There is space for up to 30 people and to reserve places please contact Ian Gower at **membership@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk** or telephone **01594 543042**



*Mitcheldean Town Hall*

# Tolkiens's Fantasy & the King With The Magic Hand

by *John Belcher*

'E ala Earendel engla beorhtast  
'Ofer middangeard monnum sended.  
"Translation: Hail Earendel brightest of angels,  
'Over Middle Earth sent to men.'

These lines from the ancient English poem *Crist of Cynewulf* were read by a young Oxford University student in 1913 while studying the Classics and then English Language and Literature and would later inspire him to write a series of books based on the concept of Middle Earth as an ancient expression for the everyday world between heaven above and hell below.



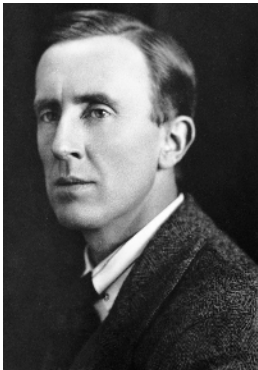
*John Belcher*

His name was John R.R. Tolkien and he was to write the most famous and successful fantasy novel of all time, *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy.

Tolkien was no ordinary writer. He was twice Professor of Anglo-Saxon (old English) at Oxford University, a remarkable linguist who spoke several languages including Latin, Greek, Ancient English, Finnish and Germanic, especially Gothic and Welsh. He also knew life at its extreme when, like most of his generation, he was sent to serve on the bloody battle fields of Europe during the 1st World War, enduring four months of horror on the Somme in 1916, where he contracted 'trench fever' disease and was hospitalised back to England.

By the late 1920's Tolkien was well established as a foremost expert on ancient peoples and cults, so it was not surprising that he was called upon by Mortimer Wheeler to help research and interpret the origins of the Celtic God Nodens to whom the Roman temple at Lydney Park was dedicated.

Mortimer Wheeler and his team were excavating the prehistoric, Roman and post-Roman settlement during 1920 to 1929, unearthing a whole way of local life that had slumbered beneath the earth for over 1400 years.



*J. R. R. Tolkien*

The settlement had been a promontory fort or small embanked hill of five acres size with a panoramic view of the area, including the River Severn, east, west and south. After the first century AD, the Romans settled there and the population became Romano-British, superceding the Silures and Celts, whose main occupation appeared to be iron mining as a third century mine was discovered nearby.

During the second-half of the fourth century AD, a temple was built in the settlement, dedicated to a hitherto unknown deity Nodens, with an associated guest house, baths and other buildings. Many votive offerings in bronze and bone were uncovered, including several dogs.

From the evidence revealed it was concluded that Nodens was a purely local deity dedicated to healing. The votive cult objects were offerings to the God to plea for his intervention. Dogs were traditionally associated with healing throughout the classical world.

Tolkien's academic explanations of the origins of Nodens are fascinating for the implications that resonate in his later fantasy writings of Middle Earth.

He pointed out that Nodens was phonetically equivalent to the Irish Nuada or the Welsh name Nudd.

Nodens/Nuada was a name that only occurred in Ireland and Britain and was Goidelic Keltic (Gaelic), not found anywhere else in Celtic Europe.



*Roman temple archaeological remains at Lydney Park  
Reproduced courtesy of Jeff Collins CC BY-SA 2.0*

Nuada was a mythological and heroic name. Nuada Argat-Lam or Nuada of the Silver Hand was the king of the Tuatha De Danann, the possessors of Ireland before the Milesians arrived. The Tuatha De Danann were the reduced form of ancient gods and goddesses. Tolkien didn't attribute anything that Nuada did in his heroic deeds with any of the features of Nodens, but he believed that it was highly probable that the two were the same.

Of Nuada Argat-Lam it was told that he was at war with the Firbolg and the Formarians. In the first battle Nuada lost his hand and his royalty which passed to Bress, chief of the Formarians for seven years. The Tuatha De Danaan made him a new hand, with all the notions of a real one, out of silver making him Nuada of the Silver Hand. Regaining his royalty, Nuada reigned for 20 years, but was finally killed in battle by the Formarians, dying like a true hero.



*The Lydney Dog (copy)  
Photo courtesy of Chris Sullivan*

Another version of the Nuada/Nodens story came later with the Welsh king Llaw Ereint (of the Silver Hand), whose daughter Creiddylad was carried off by Gwynn Vab Nudd after her betrothal to Gwythyr Vab Greiddawl. The result was an everlasting fight for Creiddylad every first of May until doomsday, when the final victor will claim her.

Tolkien also associated Nodens with the ancient Gothic word 'Ga-Nuitan' which was shared by Keltic and old Germanic. It meant 'to catch, ensnare'. He speculated that the God could have been called the 'snarer' or the 'catcher' or the 'hunter', but as Tolkien himself put it. "It is suggestive, however, in this connection that the most remarkable thing about Nuada was his hand and that without his hand his power was lost. Even in the dimmed memories of Welsh legend in Llaw Ereint we still hear the echo of the ancient fame of the magic hand of 'Nodens the Catcher'.

# An Archbishop of York and the Forest of Dean by Cecile Hunt

What is the connection between the ninety-fourth Archbishop of York and the Forest of Dean? On 25 February 1975 the ninety-fourth Archbishop of York was enthroned, he became a life peer September 1983; Baron Blanch of Bishopthorpe, North Yorkshire.

Baron Blanch or Stuart Yarworth Blanch was born in Ellwood, Coleford on the 2 February 1918. Living from age of two at Lower Viney Hill farm, now Viney Hill Country Guest House.

The farm was purchased by his father William Edwin in 1920 from Mr R Phelps. Family was; father William E, mother Elizabeth (nee Yarworth), brothers Ronald John, William James and Stuart Yarworth. They had previously lived in Ellwood before moving to Lower Viney Farm. Selling it, after only three years, to a Mr James of Yorkley.



Stuart Yarworth Blanch

William E, previously a collier, and family, had decided to quit farming. But tragedy struck the family on 31 August 1923.

William E had gone out early, as was his normal morning custom before breakfast, on Friday 31 August 1923, across the fields belonging to the farm. Not having returned by dinner time the three boys went out looking for him. Coroner's report states, Stuart, aged 5, was running ahead of his brothers Ronald and William shouted 'Here's Dad', he carried on running then called out again 'Here's someone lying down here'. Ronald and William called him back; *'...as we knew dad would not be there lying down under normal circumstances. ...Both I [Ronald] and my brother William then went down the body, and found it was dad. Stewart (sic) had gone back and my brother also sent me back. I then fetched Dr. Hill'*

William was asked if he had gone right up to the body; *'I went within a yard or so of the body but did not then see the gun'*.

William Edwin had been shot in the chest. The gun, single bore, old and recently repaired was discovered, with the butt in a hedge that William had apparently squeezed through, its barrel pointing at William's boot. He was lying in a gully at the base of the hedge. From reports, he was not in the custom of carrying a shotgun, nor used to using one. Expert witnesses agreed death had been instantaneous; the shot had been fired at close range. There were no cartridges in William's coat pocket and no sign of a struggle.

Questions were asked about William E's state of mind at the time; everyone agreed, who knew him, he was of sound mind with no worries. James Elton Yarworth, brother-in-law, farmer from Awre said *'...he had known deceased as long as he could remember. He was an exceptionally affectionate father, and was on good terms with his wife'*.

The verdict; accident, *'death due to injuries caused by gunshot wound.'* It was agreed that ... *'It is quite possible that in getting through the gap [in the hedge] the trigger might have caught something...'*

William E, age 53, was buried in Clearwell Cemetery. Stuart's mother Elizabeth, was the second daughter of William Yarworth (late) butcher and licensee of the Nailers Arms, Clearwell. After the accident she and Stuart moved to London where Stuart's brothers were already living.

Stuart served in the RAF; became a priest then vicar of Eynsham; he became Bishop of Liverpool then Archbishop of York. Married with four daughters and one son he died, 3 June 1994, in Banbury aged 76.



# Forest Officials Through Time - by Averil Kear

*The recent democratic election of our Vice Chair Sue Middleton as a Verderer invoked a train of thought about what other Forest Official posts might have existed.. Below our Vice President Averil Kear takes us through the titles and roles of various Forest Officials through time.*



## **Forester in Fee**

The Forester in Fee was the official in overall charge of the Forest - normally paying rent for the position and having particular privileges such as cabbish (the right to take dead or wind-blown wood from the Forest). There was usually a Forester or Warden for each Forest - some were hereditary positions others were appointed by the King. They had to attend the Forest Courts.

## **Foresters (walking or riding foresters)**

Officials selected by Forester in Fee - they were like gamekeepers. They were responsible for dealing with trespasses (crimes) against Forest Law, poaching and damage. There were two kinds of foresters - walking (on foot) and riding (on horseback) and they were responsible for particular areas (walks) in the Forest.

## **Agisters**

Officials, usually four in each Forest, who oversaw grazing of animals in the Forest, particularly the organisation of agistment and pannage (charge for grazing pigs in the autumn) and Fence Month (the time in June when no livestock was allowed in the Forest in case they disturbed the deer raising their young). Agisters collected the money for agistment from local people and paid it to the King.

## **Regardsers**

Local knights chosen to carry out the three-yearly inspections of the Forest. They had to check things such as whether woodland had been cleared for farming. Regardsers also attended local Forest Courts and made reports to the Forest Eyres.

## **Woodwards**

Officials appointed by local nobles (landowners) to “safeguard vert and venison” in their own woods within the Royal Forest. Although chosen and paid by the local landowner, Woodward’s had to swear an oath to The Lord Chief Justice and really worked for the king.

## **Verderers**

Unpaid officials elected from local nobility. Verderers were responsible to the King and not the Forester in Fee. They organised the local attachment courts which dealt with lesser (or less serious) crimes and sent greater offences to the Forest Eyres. Also called upon when inquiries into trespasses against the venison were held within the Forest. When the culprit or circumstances of an offence against Forest Law were unclear representatives from the nearest four vills (villages or settlements) were required to investigate - if they failed to do so they too would be in breach of Forest Law and would be subject to the imposition of fines.

## Meetings in Review *with Mary Sullivan, Ian Gower & Keith Walker*



*North Foreland  
School logo*

Averil Kear was our speaker at the 12th February talk entitled “North Foreland Lodge at Lydney”. Averil was given a book about North Foreland School for girls being housed in Lydney park during WWII. It turned out to be a diary of the memories of some of the girl pupils themselves, so Averil undertook research about the school to tell its story in this talk.

North Foreland was founded in 1904 as a private school for upper and upper middle-class girls based in Broadstairs. The Principal was a Miss Wolsely-Lewis, a devout lady. The girls wore strict uniform including white ties. There were about 39 pupils. But the Principal retired, and the number of pupils declined. A saviour was needed, and was found in the form of Finella Gammell, a young, energetic, accomplished woman. She took over and under her the school thrived.

Then came the War. Firstly, the school was evacuated to Studland Bay. But after a year that area too was threatened by bombers. So, they packed up and moved again. This time to Lydney Park, home of Viscount Bledisloe and his wife, who the girls cheekily referred to as “Old Bloody Slow”. Arriving at Lydney the girls had to walk from the station in the dark. Once settled in they had long, arduous days, starting with running around the house at 7am. Then cleaning, then lessons, an afternoon rest ending with Chapel in the evening. They also had to collect and chop wood and even harvest potatoes. Food was not good and water for baths sometimes scarce.

The lives they led at Lydney Park were far from what these upper-class girls were used to, as most would have had servants and a pampered lifestyle at home. But The Gamm, as Finella became affectionately called by all, was so loved by pupils and staff that the school grew during the War. Some foreign staff were employed with unexpected talents, like a cook who was a competent pianist and a Czech fencing master. The Gamm taught drama out on the Roman site in the grounds. Some sports played, such as lacrosse and tennis. But to go swimming meant walking to the Lydney pool. On Sunday, church was compulsory and best clothes worn. There was a real culture shock when 25 children from Fulham came to stay for a summer holiday to get away from the War. The girls thought them cocky and knowing!

After the War the school moved out to Sherfield on Loddon. Finella Gammell died in 1987 and was commemorated in Romsey Abbey. Although an inspiring teacher, she told her girls they could “train for a job, but to marry and bring up children was the best job a woman could have.” So, a woman of her age, and a fascinating interlude in our local history. **M.S**

In March a packed West Dean Centre was treated to a talk on the Severn & Wye Bridge disaster by a very enthusiastic and knowledgeable Paul Barnett from the Friends of Purton. Not only did we hear a tale of one of the worst disasters on the River Severn, but also of Paul’s mission to research the true history of the event, and to uncover the facts behind some of the myths surrounding it. We heard of trips to Risca to find an intact copy of the Gloucester Journal reporting the disaster (now in the Gloucester Archives), and of a secret liaison (!) to uncover a stash of glass sepia photographic plates of the bridge under construction in the 1870s.

The first stones of the bridge were laid in 1875, after many previous schemes to build a crossing fell by the wayside. The quantity of products from the Forest of Dean had long been increasing, and the capacity of Lydney docks to export them to the World had now been exceeded. The solution was to build the Railway bridge so that the products could be transported to Sharpness docks directly, thereby increasing export capacity substantially. Engineer George Keeling had decided on a bridge with 21 “bowstring girder” spans and included a swing bridge over the Gloucester-Sharpness canal. It took 4 years to build and was opened to rail traffic in October 1879.

Over the period from 1879 to 1960, several vessels had collided with the bridge, but on the night of 25<sup>th</sup> October 1960, contending with a roaring tide (the second highest tidal range in the world), and dense fog, two vessels – the Wasdale H and the Arkendale H, carrying fuel from Avonmouth and Swansea respectively, simultaneously collided with pier 17, causing catastrophic results. Parts of the bridge came

crashing down onto the barges and ignited the fuel; the ensuing conflagration could be seen from Popes Hill. Five crew members died. That very night, works were being carried out on the section of the bridge that was hit. Fortunately, the workmen had taken an early break to listen to a boxing match, otherwise there would have been many more casualties.

Sadly, further collisions with the bridge in the following years made the costs of repairing the bridge excessive, and the decision was made to remove it. The rails were removed in 1964 and dismantling of the remaining bridge structure finally began in 1967.

**I.G**

An excellent presentation on the whole history of the bridge can be found at:

<https://www.friendsofpornton.org.uk/severn>

and the first map of the bridge and approaches (surveyed in 1879) can be seen at

<https://maps.nls.uk/view/101453895>



*Photo by John Thorn CC BY-SA 2.0*

One of the two scheduled Zoom meetings came along on Friday 8<sup>th</sup> April when Andy Meller made a welcome reappearance to talk about “Poppies Among the Daffodils”, a synopsis of the lives and works of the Dymock Poets. It seems somewhat incredible now that for a very brief period between 1911 and 1916 that six influential poets should have centred themselves on the small village of Dymock to coexist and produce outstanding work, much of which still shines brightly today. We might know them as the Dymock poets, but they are otherwise known as ‘The Georgian Poets’ (as they wrote during the reign of George V).

The poets were Lascelles Abercrombie, Wilfred Gibson, John Drinkwater, Rupert Brooke, Edward Thomas and Robert Frost. Most of them knew each other before they came to Dymock. Their connections were mainly founded in faraway Bloomsbury in London where Harold Munro managed his ‘Poetry Bookshop’. The bookshop was at the vortex of the poetic arts scene, and Harold was a patron for poets seeking success. Poetry was changing in the 1900’s and the Dymock poets were part of it. They ultimately had a great desire to root the poetry in the landscape in which they lived, to produce colourful ‘pastoral’ poetry.

Lascelles Abercrombie was the first to establish himself at ‘The Gallows’ in Ryton, Dymock. He was the central figure in the fellowship of Dymock poets and the others either moved to be near him or were regular visitors to the area. By 1914 they were collaborating to produce a magazine called ‘New Numbers’ which was dispatched from Dymock Post Office.



*Wilfred & Geraldine Gibson  
at ‘The Old Nailshop’,  
Dymock*

No doubt the Dymock poets fellowship would have continued to be hugely influential, but it was overshadowed by WW1 and essentially dissolved in 1915.

To end, part of a poem by Wilfred Gibson originally directed to John Drinkwater, but for our purposes redirected to our speaker Andy Meller:

*You speak tonight  
Of Dymock and its daffodils  
And the great audience listens with delight:  
And yet, and yet,  
They cannot know the ecstasy that fills  
My heart to hear you – they, to whom the words  
Bring only pleasure tinged with no regret*

# My Childhood Memories of the Forest During WWII - Pt 1 *by Ron Beard*

My most vivid memories are about the soldiers who we had contact with. When the war started some nissen huts were built in the White Hart meadow near to where we lived. These were occupied by students from the local Forestry School who were transferred to the army and became members of the Royal Engineers (RE).

We became friendly with two of the soldiers and they would have Sunday afternoon tea with us and then we often played cards as family and friends - Sunday tea would consist of salad or sandwiches followed by tinned fruit and evaporated milk, and cake. We were lucky that dad was doing two jobs. During and after the war, he worked at the local colliery from 5.30 or 6.00, came home for lunch at 1.30 and then worked as a general handyman at the Speech House from 2.00 till 6.00. The lady who worked as cook at the Speech House was very kind and would slip dad the occasional tin of peaches or similar. Throughout the war we entertained soldiers like this, but unfortunately one of the soldiers died from Pneumonia, so I only remember one of the first two. He was Charlie Simpson from Gateshead. He was a very cheerful person, the son of a cut glass window expert. He then brought another soldier friend, Sid Evans, from a village in Shropshire, the son of an agricultural worker. I enjoyed their company very much, they were very friendly, although Sid was rather shy. The first time that Charlie and Sid came to tea we had pickled onions with our salad and when Sid tried to stick his fork in one it shot across the table, but it 'broke the ice' and we all made light of it.

The card game we usually played was 'Newmarket'. We had to bet on 'horses' - we played for matchsticks. I also had a shooting game in which we shot corks from a 'pop' gun at a set of Disney characters, each had their own value and we were very competitive! We built up a strong friendship with Charlie and Sid and we swapped visits for some time after the war and went to Sid's wedding.

These arrangements continued for a year or two. Then Charlie and Sid were posted to a camp near Cirencester, but they still visited us frequently for Sunday evenings. One weekend they went to catch the bus for Gloucester to return to camp but the bus was full. They came back to stay overnight with us and catch the first bus in the morning, but they were 'put on a charge' and were 'confined to barracks' for 14 days, so we didn't see them for a fortnight.

## **Prisoners of War (PoW)**

There were quite a lot of prisoners in or around the Forest. A camp was built at Broadwell (on the edges of Coleford), this was to house the Italian POWs. They were taken to work in the woods or on local farms. I encountered some prisoners who were cutting down trees in the woods near us. One of the prisoners had been employed in jewellery making before the war. He had agreed to make a ring for a local girl, and we went with her to collect it. Several Italians stayed in England after the war and some married local girls. Consequently, there have been ongoing relations between Coleford and the villages that many of the Italians came from.

One day when I was going home from school, we saw some prisoners of war who were working on the roads. I asked one of them if he was German, he said no, he was Austrian and that they were not as bad as the Germans!

