

FOREST OF DEAN LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

news
November 2019



In this edition:

- 4 page pull-out of 2020 Society Events
- Just out - New Regard 34 - order form inside
- 'A Half Franc from the Front'
- 'A Shilling for a Little White Lie!'

News

November 2019

Editor:

Keith Walker
51 Lancaster Drive
Lydney
GL15 5SJ
01594 843310

NewsletterEditor@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk

Chair:

Mary Sullivan
01594 860197

Chair@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk

Treasurer:

Cecile Hunt
01594 842164

Treasurer@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk

Secretary:

Nicola Wynn
Secretary@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk

Website:

forestofdeanhistory.org.uk

Registered Charity
No: 1094700

Printed by
Inky Little Fingers

Editors Notes

Welcome! After some consistent sterling work to extract summaries from our speakers by our joint Indoors Meetings Secretaries Liz and Caroline, we are able to give you a more rounded view of what each Society event in 2020 is all about. The event details are shown in the four page pull-out in the centre pages. The same detail is also carried in the 'Events' section of the society website:

(<https://www.forestofdeanhistory.org.uk/events/>)

The front cover shows the Kymyn Round House, which is the subject of a talk by Martin Kerrigan on Saturday 14th November 2020. (*Photo attribution Nilfanion CC BY-SA 4.0*)

The latest New Regard (number 34) has just been published. There is a brief summary of the articles later in the news section. In particular don't miss David Mullin's article "*Better to Light a Candle: Royal Observer Corps underground monitoring posts around the Forest of Dean*". This is a terrific piece of research, clearly carried out over a number of years, very well written and properly referenced throughout. David is certainly setting the standards for those of us who also dabble in writing the odd article!

Elsewhere in this newsletter, thanks to Cheryl Mayo we have been able to bring to you Olivia Bridge's article 'A Half Franc from the Front'. Congratulations to Olivia, who wrote this as part of a school project, and who, no doubt, enjoyed reading her relations letters which gave her (and us!) some insight into the life of a soldier at the front in WW1.

The WW1 theme is continued on the back cover, where John Powell throws some further light on the 'wiles and wherefores' of some of the injured WW1 soldiers who were treated at the VAD Hospital at the Town Hall in Lydney.

Finally, congratulations to Joyce Baxter, winner of the August "Where Are We" competition. The location correctly identified by Joyce was Pleasant Stile. Averil Kear has set another poser for you on page 17.

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 Mary Sullivan*

Welcome to the new season for the History Society. Thank you to those of you who attended the AGM earlier this month. I hope you found it interesting to hear a bit more about our Constitution and be reminded of why the Society was founded and has been so successful. For those who missed it, the main objective is “to advance education for the benefit of the public by the study of local history, in particular the local history of the Forest of Dean and its surrounding area.” And this is to be achieved by holding meetings, encouraging the preservation of artefacts and historical sites, publishing and selling materials and information of interest to the public etc.



Looking back over the past year or two I think we have been true to these objectives. Our programme covers a variety of topics of interest to the public, mostly but not exclusively about the history of FOD itself. We have been more involved lately in education at school level with our involvement with schools through the Foresters Forest project, helping to create interest in young people, our future members. There are plans afoot for a Children’s history of the Forest. More of this in a later newsletter. We are also working with the Dean Heritage Centre, now the main local repository for artefacts, on promoting local history at all levels. We have early joint plans for a Local History Festival, again working with the Foresters Forest team. Watch this space for more news on this exciting project too.

Returning to the AGM afternoon, for me the highlight was the attendance of Pauline and Caroline Scott-Garrett, grand-daughters of our third President, Charles Scott-Garrett, who presented the prize in their grandmother’s name to Phil Cox for his talk on the Newport Ship. Meeting Pauline and sharing some of her family photos and memories brought to life a great character who is part of the history of our Society.

The AGM also saw the launch of another excellent edition of the New Regard, number 34. Again our editor, Ian Standing, and designer, David Harris, have produced a beautiful journal of which we can all be proud. Do get your copy if you have not yet done so, either buy it at a meeting, use the order form with this newsletter or via our e shop.

We have another varied and interesting set of talks to enjoy this winter thanks to our indoor Meetings team, Liz Rudge and Caroline Prosser.

I want to extend a warm welcome to our new Committee Secretary, Nicola Wynn, who is also the Collections Officer at DHC. It is good to have new officers on the committee to bring new ideas and keep the organisation fresh. If you would like to get more involved with running the Society in any way please do let me know.

An upcoming task is to prepare an interesting display for the next Gloucestershire Local History Association day on 25th April on the topic of the History of Education in Gloucestershire. Details will follow in the next few weeks. Meanwhile, if you have any interesting photos, memories or artefacts that would enhance our display please let me or another committee member know.

I hope you enjoy the coming Winter season.

Mary Sullivan



MEMBERSHIP

Thank you to the two thirds (as at mid October) of members who have renewed their memberships for 2020 and who are therefore receiving a membership card in this newsletter. A warm welcome back!

A look at this year's varied and interesting program of talks and walks which is included in this newsletter should tempt the remaining third. Thank you in advance. Please note that if we haven't received your renewal by the end of January we will assume, with regret, that you are not rejoining us. If you know that you are not renewing, I would be grateful for an email or note to that effect so I don't keep chasing you.

You can find the renewal form on our website (under Membership) if you wish to download and email it to me, especially if you are paying by BACS; or print it, complete it and post it with a cheque. If you don't have access to the internet and if none of your details has changed, you can post a cheque made out to FoD LHS for £12 for one person or £17 for two at the same address, to Oakdean, High St, Blakeney, GL15 4DY. Looking forward to my next mountain of letters! Thank you all, and Happy Christmas from the Society.

Cheryl Mayo, Membership Secretary

Just published, **New Regard number 34** contains some excellent articles. David Mullin has again contributed a really well researched and very readable account, this time about the Royal Observer Corps underground monitoring posts around the Forest of Dean. Averil Kear tells the surprising story about the rather posh North Foreland Lodge Independent School for Girls which decamped to Lydney Park during World War 2. There is a musical undercurrent to this edition, as Roger Deeks explores the 'Persistence of the Brass Band Tradition in the Forest of Dean'. Keith Walker drills down into how the local hospitals were financed pre NHS, defining as he goes the 'Hospital Sunday' fund collection movement. He then teams up with Averil Kear to explain in a separate piece the history of Scarr Bandstand and its close association with the Hospital Sunday movement. Using the resources of the Dean Heritage Centre, Nicola Wynn (our new Secretary) explores the nineteenth century diaries of Thomas Hale. Mary Sullivan continues her work in providing sketches of the lives of the 'Founding Fathers' of this Society. John Powell has a watery tale of three wise men and the Severn Bore, exploring how 'the Enthusiast', 'the Pragmatist' and 'the Scientist' carried out early research into the baffling natural phenomenon. Finally the mystery of the Trafalgar mine CB and TB stones are investigated by Mark Ward. All in all another fantastic 64 page issue, much recommended!

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Saturday 9th November - 3pm - West Dean Centre, Bream, GL15 6JW
Nigel Haig - "Newnham, a village that once was a town"

Saturday 7th December - 3pm - West Dean Centre, Bream, GL15 6JW
Richard & Carol Clammer - "Beachley & the First World War"

Annual General Meeting 2019 *from notes by Chris Sullivan*

After approval was gained for the minutes of the previous year, the Treasurer, Cecile Hunt, was first to take the microphone. Regarding the General Fund, she reported that total receipts for the year ending 31st July 2019 were £6949.39, whilst total payments were £4704.75, leaving net receipts for the year at £2244.64. The Publications Fund was next under scrutiny. Sales of the New Regard produced £2152.01 in income, down from last year. The cost of production of the New Regard was £1379.90, slightly up from the previous year. The total receipts for the Publications Fund were £3996.55, whilst total payments were £1733.37, leaving net receipts for the year at £2263.18. The monetary assets of the Society at 31st July were declared to be; General Fund, £4732.57; Publications Fund, £5263.30; Reserve Fund, £10747.19; Paypal Fund, £709.38

The Chair, Mary Sullivan then presented her report. She reminded the members present of the varied series of talks which had been delivered during the year. She thanked the Committee members who played important parts in making the Society function well. Jo O' Hanlon was not seeking re-election, and, as the Constitution normally required the Secretary to stand down after three years, Chris Sullivan was stepping down. Roger Deeks proposed a vote of thanks to Chris



Chair Mary Sullivan with Pauline & Caroline Scott-Garrett presenting their grandfather's award at the AGM

for all his work during his tenure. But there remains one big vacancy, since a year ago, our long-serving Publications Officer, Sue Gordon-Smith, stepped down. For the moment, there was a job split between Mary, Ian Standing and Chris. It would be good to bring all elements of sales together again under a new Publications Officer.

Mary then outlined some items from the Society's Constitution. As a Charity, our Constitution is the document controlling what we can and cannot do. Some of the areas of activity in the Constitution have moved long ago to DAG (excavation) and DHC (keeping assets). However, involvement in the Forester's Forest project, where the archaeological strand has recently proven very popular, has allowed some new involvement with archaeological projects.

Next the members were reminded of the life and work of Charles Scott Garrett, a former Society President. The Scott Garrett Prize was initiated by Charles many years ago, and is given annually to the person judged to have given the best talk to the Society. This year the Society was delighted to have Pauline and Caroline Scott-Garrett (Charles' granddaughters) at the meeting to present Phil Cox with the award. Phil won for his talk on the 'Newport medieval ship'. The Cyril Hart Prize, presented for the best written and researched article in the New Regard, was won by David Mullin for his piece entitled 'Forty Shilling for Freeholders'. He was unable to be at the meeting to receive the award, but in a message he said that "34 years ago the decision to publish a journal was considered bold by many members of the Society. Time has vindicated the decision. I would like to thank all those who devote so much of their energy time and skills to the production & distribution of the New Regard."

The election /re-election of trustees then took place, with Mary Sullivan being re-elected as Chair, Cecile Hunt as Treasurer, and Nicola Wynn as Secretary. All other trustees wished to remain in post, and with no other candidates, were re-elected en bloc.

A Half Franc from the Front *by Olivia Bridge*

This article was originally a school project written by Olivia Bridge from Blakeney. Many thanks to Olivia for allowing us to reproduce it in our newsletter.



Olivia's great grandfather's watch with the coin which Colin sent from the Front

This collection of letters was written by my great-great-great-uncle, Colin Williams whilst he was serving on the Western Front in the First World War. They were written home to his mother in Brockweir, Gloucestershire. He refers to Tommy in some of the letters; this was his nephew and my great-grandfather. Colin was born in 1894, so was around 22 when he was writing the letters. Unfortunately, we do not know exactly where he was serving, other than that it was in France.

The letters are dated from July to October 1916. From family history, we know that he was injured earlier in 1916. In the letters he refers to working for French farmers. This was during a period of recuperation behind the lines. When you consider that the bloodiest battle of the war - The Somme - started on 1st July 1916, it probably suggests that his earlier injury may well have saved him from initially being involved in this.

The letters give an insight into the life of a soldier at the front. There are everyday observations; such as comparing French farming machinery to that he was used to back home (they were farmers), or about making custard. He requests things to be sent, such as thread or pomade (a hair product) to ward off the 'company' of lice. There are responses to whatever my great-great-grandmother had written about (stories about local people and events back in the Wye Valley). But he also captures the horrors of life in the trenches, which are truly reminiscent of a Wilfred Owen poem: *"where one is up dodging shells, spitting and spluttering against gas, getting nearly up to your knees in mud, going to sleep like Nelves, upright, making holes after the style of rabbit burrows to live in"*. There is an amazing description of what must have been a night time artillery attack on the enemy, described like somebody watching a firework display.

He refers to a half-franc coin that he sent for my great-grandfather to put on his watch chain. We still have this artefact.

The letters are an important first hand source from over 100 years ago. From the letters we can only begin to imagine the true feelings and terror that Colin and millions of others on both sides experienced on a daily basis - after all, the letters would have no doubt have been toned down to save the feelings of his "dearest Mother". Colin Williams survived the war. He became a minister in the Moravian Church (the local church in Brockweir is Moravian, a Christian church much like the Methodists). He went off to the West Indies as a missionary and had a fruitful life, unlike so many others who were left behind in France and Belgium.

A Half Franc from the Front

Here are two of the seven preserved letters, which show his interest in the life of the surrounding community and his concern for his parents, despite what he himself is going through.

July 25th 1916

Dearest Mother,

I am very pleased to tell you that I am very much better. I have been very glad of the rest. Of course, it has not been like being in a first-class hospital, but I have had a soft bed and blankets to keep me warm. I am expecting to join the Battalion today. As I told you I hoped to get to Service. I am glad to say I did manage to attend one. It was in a Y.M.C.A. hut and a very nice Service it was too.

Last night after supper I went down into a field below our huts and for about an hour enjoyed a very nice bit of scenery. There is a fairly large farm right opposite and so I was able to watch them working. One old chap with three dogs was minding a lovely flock of sheep and another was cultivating with a couple of horses. Then about 100 yards away, one old lady was busy hoeing potatoes I think but I couldn't be quite sure, and two more were hand hoeing roots close by. There are no fences to the fields and they split them up in the most peculiar ways. Worse even than Farmer Howells. They are just cutting their rye. They mow it and then tie it up in huge bundles.

It was a lovely evening and I enjoyed it immensely. Hope dear Mother that you and Father are keeping well. Give my love to Tommy and all at Yew Green. With my very best love to you all, I am your affectionate Son, Colin.

Oct 7th 1916

Dearest Parents,

Another line to let you know I'm still quite all right. Away from the din of battle and all its attendant horrors, but I've no news to tell you however. When one is up dodging shells, spitting and spluttering against gas, getting nearly up to your knees in mud, going to sleep like Nelves, upright, making holes in the style of rabbits' burrows to live in, etc, there is at least a little bit to talk about.

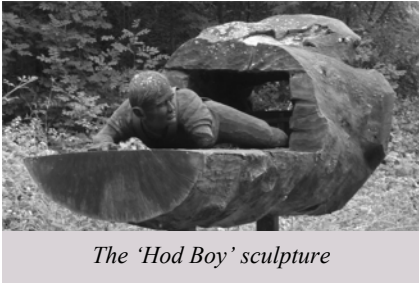
Where we are now we can get apples, potatoes, swedes, milk and a host of other things. Some we buy, some we don't. The people as a general rule are very hospitable. Some things are rather dear, but at one farm I've had two or three lots of best milk for 2d per quart. What would Bell say if someone offered him 2d a quart?

I've had a letter from Sally and Guss. Guss tells me Edwin Brown is at last passed to the great beyond. She also says that Bonds people have had a sale. I suppose she means Hewelsfield Court? You might be getting a parcel before long for Father. She asked me what I would like sent out but I know the winter will be very dull and trying for you both so I thought the parcel would at least cheer Father up a bit. I'm sending you another PC, as I know you like things like that sent. Now Dear Mother that the cold weather is coming on do please look after yourself well. Get nice warm clothes for you and Father and have good nourishing food too. If it's any good for him I should get some more of that stuff from Gravesend for Father if you still have the address.

*Please forgive me for writing like this but I do want you both to be comfy.
God bless you all, Colin.*

Editor's note: A little further research revealed that Colin Williams married Effie Kathleen Abbot on 17th January 1929 at St. Thomas in the US Virgin Islands, and met an unfortunate end by being running over by a bus in Derby, England on 12th February 1959.

Iron Production in the Dean (Part 8) by Cecile Hunt



Continuing towards Cinderford, in the wood near the sculpture 'The Hod Boy', built on the Cinderford Brook 1612-13, is the site of Soudley Furnace, known as The Kings Furnace. The furnace was surveyed in 1635; many dimensions and features are listed including a 22 foot diameter water wheel also, a 300 foot long, 12 foot broad on the top and 25 foot high and faced with turf dam, about a mile above the furnace with a flood gate of three gates, 36 foot long, 12 foot

broad and 6 foot deep with a little horse bridge over it. Half a mile higher up the brook was another dam 720 foot in length.

Buckshaft on the right is the site of Henry Crawshay's Buckshaft iron mine, opened in 1835 and closed by 1899. William Crawshay and Moses Teague started Buckshaft iron mine in 1835 when the gale was acquired. By 1840s the mine ran under the Flaxley estate. To facilitate the transportation of the iron ore from the mine a private tramway was built by the Crawshays to avoid the payment of tolls. In 1863 Henry Crawshay was granted a license from the Crown for a road or tramway. This tramway became known as 'Crawshays Tramroad' it ran from Buckshaft Iron Mine in Ruspidge in the south to the St Annals Iron Mine in the north.

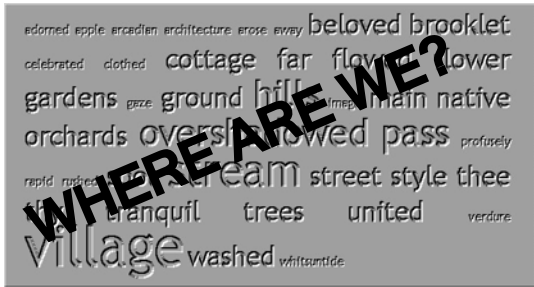
Buckshaft Iron mine produced superior red ochre which was sent overseas. In 1880 it produced 17,641 tons in one year. The red ochre produced from its ore was known around the world as "Crawshays Red". Henry supplied his father at Cyfarthfa at 14 shillings per ton. Robert Mushet tried to sell his ore to William Crawshay but William said his son Henry's ore was far superior. By mid 1860s Henry mined ore at his Buckshaft mine, Shakemantle and St Annals mines, employing 250 hands to dig the ore.

Continuing to site of Cinderford Iron Works and Forest Vale iron works we pass the Linear Park. Before landscaping in late 1990s, the area was covered with large cinders reputedly of Roman age - some had already been removed during the Second World War for re-smelting. Forge Hammer Inn in Victoria Road was named after the noise made by the steam hammer at the Forest Vale Ironworks further along the road. Forest View Residential Park was the site of Cinderford Ironworks, the first furnace in the Forest to use coke for smelting iron-ore was erected here in 1795. Ore was brought from Edgehill and other mines on backs of mules. Coke was made in the open at nearby Broadmoor and brought to the furnace on a narrow canal now filled in. Pig iron of good quality was made there but production was quite low, less than 20 tons per week. The furnace closed around 1806.

Forest Vale Ironworks, previously Cinderford Wireworks, sited on large area on corner of Station Road was a large establishment in 1850 including a foundry, it closed circa 1895.

There are other iron works and foundries in and around Cinderford all listed in Cyril Harts "The industrial History of Dean", so please go out and have a look for them.

Next ... leaving Cinderford the coach travels to Tintern's tidal dock; receiver of Forest iron ore.



In this series Averil Kear is setting a challenge for you to identify exactly where the text below is describing. The only help you are getting is that it is in the Forest area! To make it more interesting there will be a small prize for the first person who contacts the editor with the correct answer. Contact details are inside the front cover.

“As one approaches the village, the valley narrows and the woods crowd close to the river bank. Soon we reach a very different scene affording all the advantages of contrast; for, rising above a mass of thick foliage, is the dense column of smoke that tells the whereabouts of a manufactory

[Today] the first sign of the village is the conspicuous line of white council houses winding round the slopes of Highbury Hill, overlooking a narrow side valley, down which a small brook flows along an ancient meander of the Wye. The lower tinsplate works closed as late as 1961, the last factory in Britain making tinsplate by hand, and the oldest steam-driven rolling plant in the world. Now the valley is filled with ‘executive’ houses, the land between the road and the river has become a Millennium Green and a football pitch has replaced the railway sidings, where iron bars were offloaded for the tinsplate works. The railway bridge still strides diagonally across the river to reach the Boat Inn.”



Dean Heritage Centre Events

Remembrance exhibition 5th October to 17th November

The British Legion have mounted this Remembrance exhibition to commemorate those who lost their lives in the wars.

Waterloo Colliery Exhibition

19th November to 31st December

This exhibition has been put together by Steve Carter and gathers in one place contributions from many sources, especially from many Foresters themselves, who responded so generously with their time and their treasures, their knowledge and expertise. The exhibition explores the hard lives of the workers and also offers new insights into the famous 1949 flooding, potentially threatening the biggest disaster in Forest mining history, but turned into a triumph by heroic workers so that not one person’s life was lost.



Waterloo Colliery remains photographed some years ago

Traditional Christmas at DHC 14th/15th & 21st/22nd December

Join us to celebrate Xmas in a festive Forest setting. Visit Father Christmas in our cosy cottage with gifts for children, Treble Makers Choir on 14th Dec, Drybrook Male Voice Choir 21st December, Xmas children’s activities & crafts, Xmas treats in Creates Gallery & Coffee shop plus a range of unique locally produced gifts in our shop.

Further details on the website: www.deanheritagecentre.com

Meetings in Review *with John Powell*

Foresters living near and far regularly keep in touch with their roots, through Geoff Davis's SunGreen website which allows them to view old photos, ephemera and memories. Geoff is also associated with the Family History Trust and is a Forest of Dean Guide. He is also a member of the History Society, and thus it was that he rounded up 20 or so members, plus dogs, for July's fascinating woodland stroll around part of the Bream Heritage Trail.

Uphill for the first part, there were those who doubted the wisdom of such a climb, but as the air thinned so the path levelled out and the next mile and a half was mostly downhill. The object of the exercise was an exploration of Noxon Park, an area fabled for its scowles and iron ore workings. The work of man many lifetimes ago, the scowles are a source of endless fascination and wonder, especially 'The Great Noxon Collapse', a digging that turned in on itself to create a huge crater round or about 1970. Now to two mysteries. Geoff took us to an area known as 'Granny's Garden' so called, he said, because it was rich in flowers once grown in the garden of a long-vanished cottage. In fact there was another dwelling, close by, both confirmed by their presence on an old map dated 1777. The next puzzle was close by and concerned an area obviously used to contain water and also marked on an old map. Today the feature remains visible and still has a use as a wallow for the wild boar. But what was it originally? The walk continued to China Bottom and followed an old tramway back to Oakwood Valley. Here, the general view was that a couple more miles next year would do us fine!



05 25 inch 1881



Taylor - Gloucestershire 1777

**The mystery water feature is clearly marked on the Noxon Park map of 1881. But what was it?*

The two long-gone cottages are shown in Taylor's 1777 map of Gloucestershire.

A second bite of the delicious Westbury Court gardens cherry proved every bit as tasty as the first for members who attended the opening autumn meeting of the calendar held at Blakeney Village Hall on Friday, September 6. The speaker was Westbury's head gardener Jerry Green, a man steeped in the history of Westbury Court, a venue brought back from the dead by the National Trust and one now high on the list of 'must visit' locations in our part of the world.

Many of those who voted with their feet and attended Jerry's superbly presented talk and walkabout in June, were also at Blakeney obviously anxious not to miss out on the enthralling account of the history of the gardens, the story of the family who lived in the (now demolished) 'big house' and the astonishing account of how the Trust used a 300 year-old engraving as the plan for the rebirth of the gardens. Using a selection of excellent slides, Jerry teased out a fascinating story and, of course, threw in the odd mystery — for instance, why are the foundations of the walls lining the canals made up of animal bones and skulls, and what on earth is a rabbit warren doing in the middle of a vegetable patch?

Kip's famous engravings of Westbury and Flaxley featured strongly and there was also an interesting illustration of the pavilion painted by the significant Newnham artist Montafiore. Coupled with Jerry's encyclopedic knowledge of plants, the whole made for an excellent and well received evening.



And so to Yorkley's splendid new Community Centre, for the second of our September meetings, this one, on Saturday, the 21st, a tale of endeavour, enthusiasm and, ultimately success... and all down to volunteers.

Jo Smith, one of those who has contributed greatly to the growth and success of Forest Talk — the talking newspaper for blind and visually impaired — fairly bristled with enthusiasm as her instructive presentation told how the organisation began following a chance discussion between a social worker newly transferred to the Forest, and a local man who was partially sighted. That man, Geoff Roberts, took the bull by the horns and began the initial push for funding. His efforts paid off. Forest Talk began to bloom and, in only 35 years, has become extraordinarily successful.

Split into four teams, the 38 volunteers take it in turns to read through and edit the local newspapers, decide on a running order, and then transfer the items to memory sticks. These are delivered by post to members of the scheme who have their own equipment to play the content and thus keep up with the gossip! Though only founded in 1984, the steps taken in the introduction of new technology have transformed the organisation and members can now complete their work in quarter of the time it took only a quarter of a century ago.

The second part of the afternoon featured a film about the construction of the Severn Railway Tunnel. Steam train buffs and engineers were in their elements with this one. If you missed it, another showing is planned for a later date.

Pat Lacy, who lives near Coleford, has her roots on the Welsh side of the Wye and says there is no better place to be to enable more detailed exploration into medieval history. In a word, it's a hotspot. The remains of the castles at Chepstow and Raglan, combined with the stunning skeleton of the abbey at Tintern, gives her every opportunity to pursue every aspect of their past and also to explore many of the side-shoots history researchers are inevitably led down.



One of those side-shoots, the fact that Tintern — long before the coming of the Cistercian monks — was the home of a couple of Welsh saints, was the starting point for her intriguing talk '**Medieval Tintern**' which followed the Annual General Meeting held at the West Dean Centre, Bream, on October 5. Before the arrival of the monks, Celts were walking the banks of the Wye and were probably the first holy people to do so. Between the fifth and seventh centuries they had settled in and around Tintern bringing with them Christianity for the first time to south-east Wales. Their occupation continued, without a break, into the Middle Ages. The body of the talk centred on the growth of the abbey and its importance as an influential powerhouse not only in the Wye Valley, but across the river and over the hill to Severnside where the monks enjoyed extensive agricultural and fishery interests at Woolaston and Alvington.

It is to be hoped Pat's talk may encourage others to explore what remains of the abbey's Severnside interests.

A shilling for a little white lie! *By John Powell*

The Society's successful publication last year of *The Forest at War* has, predictably, brought to light additional information on a number of aspects featured in the content. Among the many subjects touched on was the Town Hall at Lydney which had been transformed from a place used for pleasure to a hospital manned by members of the Volunteer Aid Detachment. Between its opening on October 28, 1914 and the last patient leaving in February, 1919, a grand total of 3,048 servicemen were treated there.

But how did they fit in to the town's landscape? A Society member has sent us the following details recovered from an old scrap book. She writes that the first soldiers arrived at the Town Station on a dark and drizzly Wednesday night in October 1914. Cheered on by a large crowd the soldiers met with cries of 'good luck' as they were helped from the carriages and assisted to three ambulance lorries waiting in the station yard.

Over the course of the next months and years war wounded poured into Lydney and as their injuries improved so they became familiar figures taking strolls around the town. All wore the same uniforms — a royal blue jacket and trousers, a white shirt and a crimson tie. They stood out from the crowd and amused children by talking to them in regional accents.

Another recollection is of the boys in blue attempting to buy alcohol, a grave offence, as the sale of drink to wounded soldiers had been forbidden by an Act of Parliament and any licensees found guilty faced a heavy penalty. A favourite trick was to offer a local boy a shilling to go to one of Lydney's pubs saying his mother had a cold and he had been sent to buy a whisky to help cure it!

*Copies of *The Forest at War* are still available. Don't miss out! See the order form inside!



Plaque mounted near the entrance to Lydney Town Hall



The Town Hall at Lydney was pressed into service as a hospital for the duration of the First World War.

The photograph (left) was taken by Frank Harris and is reproduced with permission from Robert Marrows.