

FOREST OF DEAN LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

news
May 2017



GLHA Local History Day - the
sweet scent of success!

Also inside:

- Summer outing booking forms
- The remarkable Tilly Aston
- WW1 Cinderford Bridge Pals

The Last Remnants of Upper Forge



The early connections of Lydney to the iron working industry are rapidly being forgotten as most of the buildings associated with the former iron works have been demolished. However one structure still remains, at least in part; Upper Forge, which is located north west of Norchard station adjacent to the Dean Forest Railway. The remains of the forge are easy to find by simply following the public footpath from New Mills, adjacent to the railway line.

History records that there was an iron forge in Lydney before 1250. Iron working became more organized in Lydney through the work of Sir Edward Winter, who, in 1604, obtained from the Crown license to fell trees for charcoal on his estates in the parish of Lydney and in the Whitecroft area of the old extent of the parish of Newland, 'for the making of and working of iron'. Two years later his ironworks at Lydney comprised a furnace and a forge, with another forge, later a slitting mill, up the Newerne stream from Lydney. After the end of the Civil War, Sir John Winter regained control of the family estates and resumed iron working, making use of forges on the Newerne stream, including Pill Forge (later known as Lower Forge), New Forge (later known as Middle Forge), and Slitting Mill Forge (later known as Upper Forge).

A slitting mill was water powered machinery designed for slitting bars of iron into rods. The rods were then typically used by nailers who made the rods into nails by engineering a point and a head on the rod. The earliest known slitting mill in England was built at Dartford, Kent in 1590. It is believed that Sir John Winter adapted the former slitting mill located at what we now know as Upper Forge to be an iron forge sometime after 1660. The Winters are recorded as working the furnace and forges until 1720, but Slitting Mill Forge (Upper Forge) had been adapted or rebuilt to become a corn mill before 1717.

A later inventory made in 1844 by Joseph Sturge, land surveyor of Bristol, showed what remained at Upper Forge at that time:

A hammer wheel; One bear helve; One anvil block and plate; Two cast iron plates under the block; Two standards and plates; Blowing machinery for these fires with two cylinders, pipes, cracks and iron beams. "All this machinery remains and is still in use with but little addition. The blowing machine is worked by a large water wheel. There are ten labourers cottages, about one acre of garden ground, and a charcoal house. The pond contains 13a 0r 39p and the fall is good."

Upper Forge was dismantled by 1890. However as can be seen from the photograph, the shell of the engine house, and walls of unidentifiable small buildings survive. It is highly regrettable that one of the few remaining relics of Lydney's industrial iron working past now lies neglected and seemingly forgotten.

*Extract from OS 25 "Gloucestershire
XLV11.2 Published 1881.*

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Editors Notes

You will find full details and booking forms in the centre pages for our two summer excursions. This year the Society has joined forces with Bream Gardening Society to offer a very interesting coach excursion to Woodchester Park and Mansion, which is situated in the Cotswold hills near Stroud. The second excursion is a self drive event, which involves a guided walk around the New Mills area of Norchard at Lydney, followed by the very tempting proposition of a train trip on the Dean Forest Railway, with the added attraction of a cream tea on the train. The rear cover of the newsletter carries a feature about the history of Upper Forge, which is located near to Norchard, and which may well feature in the guided walk. Both excursions are likely to be very popular, and you are advised to book early!

The front cover of the newsletter shows, left to right, Cecile Hunt (Treasurer), Chris Sullivan (Secretary), and Mary Sullivan (Vice-Chair). They were photographed at the Gloucestershire Local History Association Local History Day in March, when they had just learned that the display which you can see behind them had been given an accolade for being the best display at the History Day. Apologies to Cheryl Mayo, our Membership Secretary, who was also busy helping during the day but was not photographed at the time. You can read more about the display in later pages.

We have two feature articles in this edition. Firstly Ian Wright completes his two part story about the expatriate Aston family, with a look at the amazing life of Tilly Aston, who, around the turn of the 20th century, blazed a trail in Australia for the blind community. In the second feature article, Ron Beard tells the story of his father and his father's Cinderford Bridge pals' adventures in World War One. In an innovation, you can actually hear Ron's father Jim recounting some of his experiences. Just follow the internet link shown at the bottom of Ron's article.

Finally, I would like to say a big 'thank you' to John Powell who provides most of the reviews of the meetings which you can read in these newsletters. John always provides a proper insight into the subject of the meeting, and in a subtle way, how the audience reacted to speaker at the meeting.

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.

News From The Chair with Simon Moore

Such a lot seems to have happened since our last newsletter, multiple awards have been made to the society and it's members; which not only reminds us of the high standard that we work to as a group but how highly we are regarded as a Local History Society; well done to all of you; we have elected a new Verdrerer to protect Her Majesty's interests in the Forest's 'Vert and Venison', a truly ancient and historic position which we are pleased Rich Daniels has been honoured with; and some of you brave souls had the opportunity to climb the scaffold of Newland Church!



We have reached the end of our indoor meetings programme until the Autumn.....but take heart members there are lots of summer events on the horizon, as detailed in this newsletter and I'm sure as Cheryl learns of more local events she will email round to you all; if we don't have a current email address for you, please let Cheryl know so that we can update our list.

As I'm sure you will have seen in the local press the 'Forester's Forest' project, for which we sit on the programme board, has been successful in getting it's £2,500,000 grant to proceed with the five year programme of projects to celebrate, research, record, preserve and support the heritage of the Forest of Dean, that makes it such a special place. Congratulations to Sue Middleton, her team and all the project leaders for all their hard work, if you want to find out more or get involved look at their website at www.forestersforest.uk or contact myself or Mary and we will put you in touch with somebody who can help. There are some really interesting and important projects in this programme and we would love you to be involved in as many as possible. One such project which I would urge you to get behind is the Oral histories project which we learnt about from Roger Deeks at our last indoor meeting, it is so important to capture the memories and sound of traditional Foresters whilst we still have the opportunity.

I am delighted to say that a few of you have stepped forward and are looking to join the management committee that run this society, which is great news, however there is always room for a few more... especially somebody with an interest in IT to help run the website and look after the IT side of things, this is not as daunting as it sounds, we have two laptops that need updating and kept ready for use at the meetings; and to liaise with our IT consultants at iLateral, who are really easy to talk to; and editing the website content.....reading it and posting it to the site....come on - there is lots of help available and you can always get your Grandchildren to help you out!

Finally, a thought about the importance of recording things. I've noticed over the years that the Victorians were good at doing plans showing the proposed alterations to a building but rarely did plans that recorded the old layout....which is frustrating....I think we are now better at this. St Mary's Church in Lydney is undergoing some internal alterations, you will have seen the press release in the local papers. Phase 1 involves the removal of pews in the south aisle so that the floor can be levelled and the space left



South aisle of St Mary's Church, before recent building work started.

open.....this has revealed some interesting archaeology. We knew that there were crypts or burial vaults under the floor....this is an ancient church and burials within the church were common until the 1870's....but there was no record of where these were located, a few memorial plaques and the odd stone in the aisles which hinted at them. The Victorians had 're-ordered' the Church in the 1850's and installed the current pews on raised timber platforms....we have a plan of how this was proposed but nothing to show what was there before.....as it turns out there is more floor with voids (vaults and crypts) below it than unused floor....and a large collection of ancient lead coffins! They must have known what was below the timber platforms, if only they had stuck a note in their minute book!

Simon Moore



Membership

We're well into the membership year now and new memberships have slowed, but they keep coming, and the Society is pleased to offer a warm welcome to the following new members: Paul Stephens-Wood and Janice Bridgen, John Lane and Jayne Fuller, Andrew and Susan Woodward, and Helen Lee. We hope you very much enjoy the benefits the Society brings.

I decided not to make my standing plea for offers to serve on the committee (you can take that as said and still valid), but instead to remind members who are not on the email distribution list and would like to be, to **please send me your email address** at membership@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk. I won't overload you, but if you want to know what other history-related events are going on in the Forest or the wider area, then this is the way to find out. I would also like to remind members to look at our website from time to time. The news blog has bits and pieces of news, and you are always welcome to send me anything you would like advertised, not just to members but to anyone who visits our site, and we can post it there.

Thank you for your ongoing support, and enjoy the summer months ahead.

Cheryl Mayo, Membership Secretary

Members can order in print issues of the New Regard from the online 'eshop', simply select the 'New Regard' tab at store.forestofdeanhistory.org.uk

Members can obtain a discount, by using the voucher code when prompted.

Note that the voucher code will change to 'Mireystock' on 1st May 2017.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Sunday, May 7th - 2'30pm - Meet opposite the Fountain Inn, Fountain Way, Parkend, GL15 4JD Led by Ron Beard, "A Walk around the Mines of Parkend".

The walk will be conducted along roads, woodland paths and tracks, so suitable footwear will be needed. We will explore the remains of the old mines, which the area is honeycombed with.

Tuesday, May 9th - 7'30pm - West Dean Centre, Bream, GL15 6JW Roger Bryant - "A Year-Long Walk in Woodchester Park".

Meeting, hosted by Bream Gardening Society, to which FODLHS members are invited to attend. Admission £2, to include tea and coffee.

Saturday, June 10th - Coach Tour to Woodchester Park and Mansion Jointly organised by FODLHS and Bream Gardening Society.

For full details of the excursion, please see the booking forms in the centre pages of this newsletter.

Sunday July 9th - 2'00pm - Meet at Castlemain Depot, which is on the north side of the Parkend to Yorkley road, a short distance beyond the road to Parkend Church. Led by Ian Standing, "Church Hill Enclosure - How Old is a Tree?"

A guided walk looking at trees of many types and ages. The walk is mostly on tracks but there will be some difficult ground to reach a couple of veteran oaks. Please wear suitable footwear.

Saturday, August 12th - "New Mills & Cream Tea" - Self Drive Event Led by Cecile Hunt.

For full details of the excursion, please see the booking forms in the centre pages of this newsletter.

ADVANCE NOTICE - CHANGE OF EVENT AND MEETING PLACE!

Saturday, September 9th - 3'00pm - Newnham Masonic Hall, GL14 1DA John Gillo - "Freemasonry in the Forest"

Gloucestershire Local History Association - Local History Day

The Gloucestershire Local History Association is a County wide 'umbrella' organisation to which most of the Local History Societies of Gloucestershire are affiliated.. Each year the GLHA holds a 'Local History Day', as part of which affiliated societies are invited to present displays on a specific theme. This year the theme was "Gardens for Food, Fun and Flowers".

For many years the FODLHS has produced displays at the Local History Day without 'reward'. It was therefore a special moment on Saturday March 18th when, on behalf of the FODLHS, Mary received the congratulations of GLHA Chair, Steven Blake, for the best Society display at the event. Essentially 'curated' by Mary and Chris Sullivan, the display also contained material supplied by members Cheryl Mayo, Averil Kear and Di Standing (Bream Gardening Society). The six themes of the display were:

- Lydney Old Park
- Lydney Park Garden under the 2nd and 4th Viscounts
- The Bream Gardening Society
- Flora Klickman's garden
- Henry Cook's garden
- Alec Kear's garden

If you missed seeing the display then you will have another opportunity, as when the new Gloucestershire Archives Heritage Hub opens in Gloucester, the FODLHS Display will be the first to be shown at the new Heritage Hub.

At the same event members Cherry Lewis and Keith Walker were short listed for the Bryan Gerrard award for the best article on an aspect of Gloucestershire's history in a local history publication during the preceding year. Keith Walker was awarded a prize as joint runner up.



Vice Chair Mary Sullivan being congratulated for the best 'Society Display' by GLHA Chair Steven Blake at the recent GLHA Local History Day

Correspondence

Society member David Mullin has written in response to an article which featured in the last newsletter:

I have enjoyed and learned much from Cecile Hunt's article *Why County, Shire, Hundreds?* I offer a minor correction and a little additional information:

In Part 2, (*Newsletter*, February 2017), writing about the Local Government Act of 1888, Cecile says that '... counties were created in the process getting rid of areas belonging to one county located in another county (enclaves and exclaves)...'. The 1888 Act did give the new county councils powers to tidy up their boundaries, but enclaves & exclaves had already been dealt with by the Counties (Detached Parts) Act of 1844. In the example she gives, Lower Lea (not a parish, but probably a remnant of the manor of Lea, amounting to about 150 of the 530 acres of Lea parish) was transferred from Gloucestershire to Herefordshire when the Act came into force on 20th October 1844.

The 1844 Act did not address the issue of divided parishes. For example, the settlement of Lea included four detached parts of Newland parish, Gloucestershire. It took three Acts of Parliament (The Divided Parishes and Poor Law Amendment Acts of 1870, 1876 and 1882) to sort out the confusion and administrative difficulties caused by divided parishes. The situation at Lea was finally resolved in 1883 when, under the provisions of the 1882 Act, the four detached parts of Newland were transferred to the parish of Lea and county of Herefordshire.

Tilly Aston - Disability Rights Campaigner by Ian Wright



The photo shows Tilly Aston teaching children Braille in Melbourne, Victoria. Through her efforts services and conditions for blind people were greatly improved and were often at the forefront of world change.

From the Tilly Aston Heritage Collection.

In the last edition of the Newsletter we learnt how two Foresters, Ann Howell and Edward Aston, met and married before emigrating to Australia, where they eventually settled in Carisbrook. In the final part of the story, Ian Wright tells us about their remarkable daughter Tilly Aston.

In 1882 Tilly met Thomas James, a miner who had lost his sight in an industrial accident and who had become an itinerant blind missionary. James introduced her to the Braille method of reading and she began to develop her interest in literature. After a visit to Carisbrook by the choir from the Victorian Asylum and School for the Blind in Melbourne, led by Reverend William Moss, her mother, Ann, agreed to allow Tilly to attend the Asylum boarding school.

Tilly finished school at the age of 16 and went to live with her brother, Stephen, and their mother at Moonee Ponds. She enrolled in an arts degree

at the University of Melbourne, the first blind Australian to do so. However, the lack of Braille books made it impossible for her to complete her degree and she was bitterly disappointed when she had to discontinue in her second year. Such challenges became the impetus for her commitment to improving the lives of others with impaired vision. She passionately believed that the blind and partially sighted had both the right to an education and the ability to run their own affairs.

In order to make education accessible to the vision impaired, in 1894 she founded the Victorian Association of Braille Writers. The Association soon established training programmes for sighted volunteers to learn and transcribe Braille and it went on to launch Victoria's first Braille library. In December 1895, Tilly arranged a meeting which resulted in the formation of the Association for the Advancement of the Blind, with the aim of improving conditions for the blind and partially sighted. The Association was run for and by the vision impaired which was a condition of membership. Tilly was its first secretary, serving for nine years in a post where she also assumed the duties of treasurer. When a decision was made to employ a paid secretary, she was elected President.

The Association worked to change Government policy and made contact with people who were vision impaired throughout Victoria, creating networks and carrying out regular visits. It provided financial relief for those in need and worked to increase employment opportunities. The Association forced the government to concede free postage for Braille material, transport concessions for the vision impaired and eventually won voting rights for blind people in 1902. In addition Tilly successfully helped to lobby for the repeal of the bounty system which meant blind people had to pay hefty levies before they could travel interstate. She also gained government approval for a pension for all blind people. Many of these gains inspired the struggle for the human rights of vision impaired people internationally.

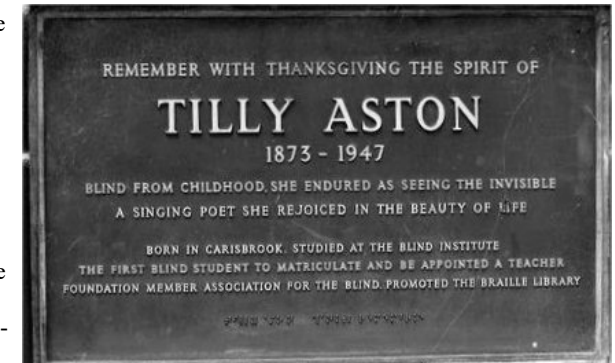
At this time Tilly started writing and in 1901 she published her first book, *Maiden Verses*. In 1904 she won the Prahran City Council's competition for an original story. *The Woolinappers or, Some Tales from the By-Ways of Methodism* was published in 1905 and from September 1908 'The Straight Goer' was serialized in the *Spectator*.

Her mother, Ann, died in 1913 and Stephen married and moved out of their shared accommodation. Tilly was unable to live alone and so moved to her own house in Windsor where she lived with the support of a

housekeeper and companion. In the same year she completed her teacher training and became head of the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind, the first vision impaired person to do so. Her appointment was criticised by staff and officials who did not approve of a vision impaired teacher. In addition, during her tenure, she was required to sever her connections with the societies she had helped to found. In spite of this she proved to be a competent teacher and administrator, although her years at the school were not happy. She retired in 1925 and then devoted her life to campaigning and writing. She was also re-elected president of the Association for the Advancement of the Blind, a position she held until her death.

Her later books, which she drafted in Braille and then typed, included *Singable Songs* (1924) and *Songs of Light* (1935). 'Gold from Old Diggings' was serialized in the *Bendigo Advertiser* from August 1937 and *Old Timers* was published in 1938. She believed *The Inner Garden* (1940) contained her best work. Her sense of humour and courage are shown in her *Memoirs of Tilly Aston* (1946), written while a member of the Bread and Cheese Club, an Australian arts and literary society. All her books were published in Melbourne. For twelve years she edited and largely wrote *A Book of Opals*, a magazine issued in Braille for use in Chinese missionary schools. She was also a keen exponent of Esperanto and corresponded with fellow linguists all over the world. Tilly died in Windsor, Melbourne in 1947. A year later the Midlands Historical Society and Carisbrook school children erected a cairn to her memory.

Thanks to Chris O'Sullivan in Australia and Keith Walker for providing information and corrections to earlier drafts. Chris is related to Ann Aston through Ann's sister Susan. He kindly forwarded me a copy of Tilly's memoirs and information from the family diary journals.



You can now visit the Tilly Aston Memorial Centre which opened in 2014 in Carisbrook. The plate shown above was erected as part of a stone memorial at Carisbrook in 1970.

The WW1 Cinderford Bridge Pals by Ron Beard

This is the story of five young men from Cinderford Bridge who enlisted in December 1915. The account is based on the words of Jim Beard from a conversation in the 1970s

The five were Jim Beard, Tom Beard, Arthur Beddis, Buller Turley and Joe Walkley. Tom and Arthur were cousins of Jim, and Buller was his best mate. They were probably typical young Foresters; in the 1911 Census four of them were colliery workers and Joe worked for the Crown. Social life was largely based on gathering around the Bridge in their leisure time. Jim and Buller played rugby together - Jim at scrum half and Buller at fly half - and their ambition was to play for Cinderford. They were also 'rough kids' as Jim explained, who would fight anybody. In fact they were Christened Edwin and Frederick but their reputation led to their nicknames of Jim and Buller. Jim after an Irish American boxer - Jim Tully, and Buller after General Buller of Boer War fame.

Their enlistment came about with the formation of a Pioneer Battalion for the Worcestershire Regiment in the Autumn of 1915. The Forest of Dean MP, Colonel Sir Henry Webb had previously raised the Forest of Dean Pioneer Battalion for the Gloucestershire Regiment. He was now called upon to raise, at his own expense, a Severn Valley Pioneer Battalion for the Worcester's.

The Five young men decided to enlist for this battalion even though they were under the minimum age of nineteen at the time (each pretended to be one year older). They first went to Malvern and Norton



The Cinderford Bridge 'Pals'
Photo shows : Back: 1 Arthur Beddis, 2 Tom Beard,
3 Probably Joe Walkley.
Front 1 Jim Beard, 2 probably Fred "Buller" Turley M.M.,
3 probably Harold Turley.
Photo courtesy of Geoff Davis (www.sungreen.co.uk).

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Barracks Worcestershire before being sent to Larkhill for their basic training. Jim described the arrival at Larkhill:

"Ah Salisbury Plain, ... training was...terrible. We was all glad to get to France to get out of it. First fella we met there the instructor said 'Beard, Beard, bist thou any relation to Ned Beard'? I said Oy".

"I hope thou's a different soldier to him then... he wouldn't do nothing at all" he said him deserted and they never bothered about him... Come to live down at Awre, on the farm there and him stopped there until the War was over.

There were some good points however:

"I was there for about six months and best about that was we used to go around Stonehenge which was about a mile...it was voluntary look... run round there and come back and have a cup a tea and a piece of cake. So I volunteered for that and I enjoyed it and all we did from around Cinderford but the townies they wouldn't do it."

After completion of their training the Battalion was sent to Picardy where they first saw action on November 13th at the Battle of the Ancre (a tributary of the Somme). This was the final battle in the Somme Campaign and the Severn Valley Pioneers were in support The attack was led by a Naval Battal-

History In Nature (Part 1) by Cecile Hunt



The tree-scape of Lydney, ancient and otherwise, viewed from Primrose Hill.

History is always with us in many ways; do you research nature as you would other aspects of history?

What can nature tell us about where you live? Here in the Forest of Dean there is so much nature to explore and research.

The history of British woodland since the last glaciation is inextricably linked with the development of civilization. Natural wooded, grazed, landscapes became managed wood-pastures with the domestication of stock.

By the Eleventh century most of England was farmland with islands of wood, these were less evenly distributed than now; a few areas were the opposite, mainly wooded with islands of farmland - these latter areas included the Forest of Dean. There can be no certain distinction between ancient and "not-ancient" woodland. For practical purposes the line has been drawn at the year 1600 because that was the time when the first reasonably accurate maps were being produced.

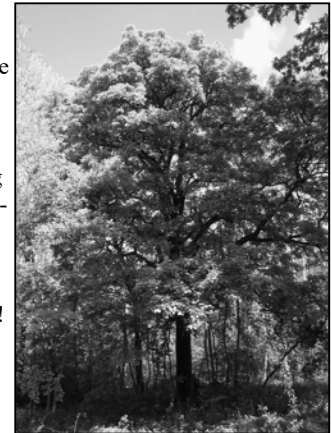
Planting that followed, for some time afterwards, took place mostly in orchards, parks and grounds of large houses, only rarely in woods. It can be assumed that virtually all woods in existence by the year 1600 were of natural (in contrary to planted) origin.

Trees and shrubs in ancient woodlands may have been felled or cut for coppice at various times since 1600; as long as the area has remained as woodland, i.e. the coppice stools have re-grown or the stand has been replanted soon after felling, then it still counts as ancient woodland. Because it may have been cut over many times in the past, ancient woodland does not necessarily contain old trees as in the Forest of Dean which covers around 11,000ha. and lies between the Severn and the Wye. Its original extent never passed beyond these two natural boundaries

Some ancient woods may be 'primary' in the sense that they are on sites that have always been woodland, back to the pre-Neolithic wildwood. However in many cases ancient woods have been cleared in the distant past: for example they may contain the remains of early Medieval, Saxon, Roman or Iron Age remains - such as in the Forest of Dean. As long as there has been no complete clearance of the site since 1600 such woods are still 'ancient'.

Ancient woods are characterised by the presence of certain "indicator" species. These are plants or animals which have great difficulty colonising sites once they have been cleared. Their presence does not mean that clearance has never taken place, but that any clearance must have been so long ago that its effects are negligible. Indicator species chosen are commonly plants rather than animals. Plants are usually conspicuous, relatively easy to identify and do not hide or absent themselves when humans are present!

The Wild Service Tree; rarely reproduces by seed in this country; only reproduces by suckering, making them rare outside of ancient woodland; in Upper Old Park Wood, on Lydney Park Estate, several Wild Service Tree have been recorded. There are some on the cliff top near Cliff Farm Lydney, north of Lydney Harbour, and several in Newent and Dymock areas. Berries of the Wild Service tree, called chequers, used to be used to flavour beer and gave their name to public houses - The Chequers'.



Wild Service Tree
Photo © Andrew Dunn
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Meetings In Review *with John Powell and Cheryl Mayo*



Bells Old Grammar School

In many clubs and societies the time was that when a long-serving and loyal member attained the status of a vice-presidency it was an indication he or she had arrived at the pinnacle of achievement. Put another way, it was a sideways shove. They were no longer expected to drive the bus, but were more comfortable on the back seat with their feet up. Not so in OURS! Our VPs have to sing for their supper...in fact they have to compose the music, hand out the hymn sheets, conduct the choir, then clean and lock-up the vestry! To make matters as difficult as possible, Averil Kear was given an unenviable February date — the 11th — to make her contribution to this year's programme.

'**The Rise of Education in the Forest of Dean**' hardly grabbed at the doubters who had to brave a bitterly cold day and the alternative attraction of the greatest of all rugby fixtures, England v Wales, live on the telly! Beforehand, several confessed that the journey to Bream had been made out of loyalty. But there was a first-class turn-out. And, more importantly, not a single person left disappointed. Our Averil knows her stuff and had clearly done her homework.

With the aid of excellent illustrations she turned the clock back to the roots of learning when the role of the church was vital in planting the seeds of education locally. The task was taken on by wealthy mine owners until the day dawned when schooling became available to all. At times it was a tortuous route but not all sad, and listeners were left to admire those who paved the way towards the facilities we enjoy today. Yes, and money was much tighter then than it is now! Averil's was a fascinating, well presented and humorous hour-long journey of discovery — and most of us had recorded the rugby anyway!

After the tea interval, in the now familiar 20 minute slot, Cecile Hunt presented a series of local aerial views and invited the audience to tell her just what they were seeing! The audience duly obliged! J.P.

An 'aside' from a fascinated listener to John Putley's racy, humorous and informative talk at the Society's meeting held at the West Dean Centre, Bream, on March 11th, was that our history man would make a hugely successful teacher. It encouraged a small group of us chatting over our interval tea and biscuits to recall our own schooldays when chalk whizzed across the classroom for getting what happened in 1066 muddled with events in 1666! Back to the point and, yes, we all agreed our Mr Putley was just the bloke to get youngsters interested and enmeshed in gobbling up information about their ancestors and what happened in the past. It was not just dates that were important but how people lived, what they thought, and how they sought redemption and forgiveness. Those who became absorbed with John's talk will certainly have a view to express when the word 'purgatory' is next used in conversation!



Geoffery Chaucer as a Pilgrim

John's chosen subject for the afternoon was '**As Sure as God's in Gloucestershire - Pilgrims and their destinations**'. His hour-long illustrated presentation took us all over the globe but mainly, of course, to the middle east, and it soon became clear that, as ever, money was at the root of all evils. If you had sinned, then there was only one way to get Brownie points and that was to buy them...thus the pilgrimages to slip a pound or two into the pot of a long-gone saint. The talk helped put pilgrims and pilgrimages into context and touched on several other aspects of history including holy wells. We have a few in the Forest and plenty in the county...now there's a thought for a future talk or, perhaps, **The New Regard!**

For this meeting the 20 minute slot was taken by Vice-President and Newsletter Editor Keith Walker who gave an absorbing lesson in how to get the best from the Society's website. However the web site could certainly do with some extra support. Is there a Website Editor out there?! J.P.



Peter Strong

Your reviewer was once told that nothing galvanised the sharpness of thought more than being a member of a jury sent out to consider the evidence and adjudicate at the close of a trial for murder. OK, there were none of the trappings associated with the formalities of the 'real thing' when members of our society — meeting at Blakeney Village Hall on the evening of Friday, March 24 — had to concentrate their minds and weigh up the evidence in the case of Edward Barnett who was in the dock at Monmouth charged with killing Esther Stephens, best known in her day as 'Kymin Bet'.

The gripping story was revealed by Peter Strong, chairman of our neighbouring Caldicot Local History Society. He proved to be an accomplished and skilful 'reporter' who laid out all the facts in the grim but true tale surrounding the demise of 'Kymin Bet.' Having given both sides of the 'evidence', Mr Strong put his audience to the test. Would they reach the same conclusion as the jury of 1828? Would they commit Barnett on a charge of murder and the ultimate penalty of death by hanging, or opt for the lesser charge of manslaughter and a lengthy spell in prison? Just three of our society members found Barnett guilty of murder; 40 or more found for manslaughter. So what did the real jury decide?: It was murder! Hence there was plenty more to debate, principally on how society has changed. Are we now more cautious and more generous? Would some of the majority have changed their minds had a murder verdict not involved the ultimate penalty? J.P.

On 1st April, members of the Society visited Newland Church to hear about the Heritage Lottery funded refurbishment of the tower and - for those who wished to do so - to climb the scaffolding to see the work close up. The talk by an enthusiastic and knowledgeable Lisa Edwards, the contractor, was fascinating, revealing as it did the complexity of these projects: different stones being sourced from quarries around the country - in cases where our own local quarries no longer operate; the technicalities of mortars; and the delicacy of the work to both repair and conserve the stonework. And all of this being done a long way up in the air, in all weathers.

Our very sincere thanks to Lisa, and also to Laura Stevens who organised the morning for us. C.M.



Intrepid Local History Society members who had climbed up the scaffolding to the top of the tower at Newland church

The guest speaker for the society's April meeting had a way with words — not written but spoken. Roger Deeks, of Oldcroft, brought to life Forest affairs — from sheep badgering to mining and much in between — and all achieved with the assistance of the humble tape recorder.

Your reviewer suspects most of us regret not taking the time to record the words of our grans and gramps. They always seemed to have a tale to tell of the old days, occasionally colourful, doubtless exaggerated, but always interesting and inevitably told with a twinkle in the eye. In the nick of time Mr Deeks and those involved in the Foresters' Forest project are coming to the rescue as they busy themselves buzzing round the Dean recording for posterity those who worked in many of the now vanished industries. However, it is not just a world for men. As this wonderful project gathers momentum, an increasing number of women are telling their stories, each one as interesting as those of the men. Members were treated to some superb, almost startling recordings, the content of which gripped the imagination. There's much more to be achieved and members were encouraged to become involved as more volunteers will be needed as the project spreads its wings.

Opportunities to assist with recordings already carried out by the late Elsie Olivey, of Cinderford, were explained by Nicola Wynn, Collections Officer at Soudley's Dean Heritage Centre. Many, she said, were so delicate the best advice was that they should not be played until they had been properly conserved. Now assistance was needed to track down information about those who had been recorded by Mrs Olivey in the 1980s. J. P.