

THE CHEPSTOW SOCIETY

Members Bulletin

June 2020



www.chepstowsociety.co.uk

Notes from the Chair

Some weeks ago I wrote to a company called Miles Away (Holdings) Ltd, who are the registered proprietors of the Herbert Lewis store in Chepstow High Street.

I expressed the Society's concern at the continued closure of the store premises and the adverse effect it was having on the town and asked what their plans were for its future.

On 11th May I received a phone call from Mr Miles Morgan, one of the Directors of the company, who apologised for the delay in replying to my letter and told me of his plans for the premises.

Apparently, he had a buyer for the whole site which he thought would be ideal for the town. He did not tell me who this was but, in any event, what happened was that after delaying the purchase for a considerable time, the buyer pulled out of the deal.

Mr Morgan therefore intends to put the building back into the three units which, evidently, it was originally. No doubt older members will remember this. He is adamant that he is going to preserve the frontage which he thinks is an impressive part of the High Street.

He intends to demolish the brick extension at the rear and build cottages to match the white cottages there at present.

He is keen to proceed as quickly as possible with this work and I think that we can all applaud his desire to make this building a useful asset to the town while preserving its impressive façade.

I don't know how the Covid-19 lockdown has affected Mr Morgan's plans but it does seem as though the building is in the hands of someone with the town's interests at heart.

Finally, although I don't know when we'll next be able to hold a meeting, in the hope that we shall be able to hold something this year, these are the talks that are set up for the remainder of 2020:

September 16 – Dr Sarah Barber –
The Life of Henry Marten

October 21 – Paul Barnett –
The Mulberry Harbour

November 18 – Gillian White –
Henry VIII and the Field of the Cloth of Gold.

Geoff Sumner

Anna Tribe

The passing has been announced of a lady who was a notable County luminary. Anna Tribe was related by blood both to the Dukes of Beaufort and Nelson's Lady Hamilton.

Members will perhaps remember her coming to talk to us on the Nelson connection. She came on other occasions, once in the early days when she was labouring up the staircase to the top floor of the Gate House with her heavy projector. We once met in that room.

Amongst her many commitments, she was a founder of the Raglan Local History Society and a stalwart executive member of the Monmouthshire Antiquarian Association, as well as many other committees. She had been a surviving scion of the old County of Monmouthshire gentry, and with her passing an era has come to an end. She will be irreplaceable.

Keith Underwood.

EXCURSIONS



Holiday – France and Belgium

In line with other organisations' holidays, we have decided to postpone the above holiday until April 2021. Everyone who has booked to go to Belgium should have received an email with the new dates - if not please let us know.

We have very much appreciated the support and continued enthusiasm for this venture, and even though it has involved a considerable amount of extra work for us we will continue to work on your behalf to ensure that it is successful.

If anybody else is interested in joining us, please contact us.

Other excursions are on hold for the time being, but we are continuing to look at different locations and ideas.

***Keith and Sallie James, 01594 529713 or
kp.james@btinternet.com***

"Ashcroft" (formerly Ash Cottage) and "Newhouse"

I recently requested the Deeds of "Newhouse" from the Halifax.

To my amazement a package arrived comprising many documents dating from an Auction Sale in 1924 of "Crossway Green Farm and associated lands and properties". These documents covered the sale on Plot 121 of the Ordnance Survey comprising the properties "Ash Cottage" and, subsequently, "Newhouse".

The sale covered 13 Lots, see 11 on the map, where Lot 7, "Ash Cottage" was sold for £1000 and occupied successively by the purchaser, his widowed wife and married daughter until 1969.

The property, now known as "Ashcroft", was sold to a new owner in 1969. The new owner sold the orchard portion of the garden to a local builder. The builder built a 3 bedroom house on the plot and sold it to Rosemary and Chris Penrose in 1971 for £6600, reduced to £6450 when the buyers agreed to forego floor tiles and to do internal decoration themselves!

If you study the 1924 map relative to a current version you will see lots of changes with many housing developments and undeveloped land under threat of development.

See if you can sort out what has happened on the 11 plots. Answers to Chris Penrose but no prize for the best answers, just the thrill of winning!

Lots 12 and 13 fronted on to Lower Church Street and comprised a Laundry and a Warehouse. Now houses and possibly the Drill Hall Car Park.

GEOGRAPHY WORDSEARCH

Answers to last month's puzzle:

Bulwark - Chapel Rock - Cleddon - Danes - Itton -
Lancaut - Livox - Mathern - Porthcasseg -
Runston - Stroat - Thornwell - Undy - Veddw

Chris Penrose

Keith Underwood continues his memories of his early years growing up in Sedbury...

May 8th 1945 – VE Day

I had left the Junior Mixed School in Sedbury, housed in the now-demolished Warrant Officers' and Sergeants' Mess and set up temporarily after the raid on the Army Technical School (Boys) in November 1940, to prevent children having to walk to Tutshill School.

Dissatisfied with the inadequate "dame school" nature of the school, my father had sent me to Oakfield Preparatory School on Hardwick Hill. A half dozen other army children and a young woman teacher from an army family also went to the school.

We travelled by Red and White bus, alighting at Bulwark Corner, opposite a gate in the wall that led into the lovely kitchen garden of Mr Bodenham, the husband of Miss Nightingale – yes, a kinswoman of the Lady of the Lamp. It was some time before we twigged that he was the husband and not just the gardener!

The path through the garden was a short cut up to the house, thus avoiding the traffic on Hardwick Hill – just as busy but a great deal narrower.

I don't seem to recall much of VE Day itself, save for the flags and bunting in the town. I was given a patriotic lapel badge by an elderly visiting uncle.

Sedbury however put on a magnificent tea on trestle tables in the field opposite where the Surgery now stands.

Although there was fraternisation between the army and the local families, the communities being separated by a rural tract of land between Sedbury and Pennsylvania Village (where the army quarters were), there was a degree of distancing between the two.

The army families were part of a community based on Beachley which put on entertainments, provided medical and dental care and had a NAAFI used by the wives.

However the VE Day tea seemed to mark the war's ending in many ways and any barriers there might have been came down. All the wives and their husbands came together to provide a magnificent spread, the cookhouse coming up with cakes of differing sizes, iced in often violent colours.

Pantries were opened up, and stocks so carefully and jealously stored were broken out. Blancmanges, jellies, tinned fruit and sandwiches were spread along the tables, while parents, assisted by army apprentices and staff waited on the children, amongst whom were several evacuees.

Throughout the war the Apprentices' School put on gymkhanas on the playing fields, with sideshows made in the workshops. These were often brought out for local events, in particular the Tidenham Show, and might well have been set on that day, though I have no memory of other events.

The Hall of the WOs' and Sergeants' Mess, used by the Junior Mixed School, was often the centre of local functions to which local people were invited.

Within a few years of the tea, the field was built on, brick houses being part of an extensive post-war development. Both local families and the many servicemen being demobbed earnestly needed housing, and Sedbury as we now know it began to come together as a village.

Keith Underwood

Why We Moved To Chepstow

After 33 years of splendid isolation in our country cottage betwixt Itton and Devauden, it was time to make up our minds about our future.

We had decided some years before that we should enjoy the cottage whilst we could, but not grow old there due to the demands of the 1½ acre garden and maintenance problems of a 180 year old building.

Where should we move to? We have no children and so the world was our oyster. An “elders” village in Spain? A cottage in Pembrokeshire? A retirement flat? A mobile home? Or sell up and go round the world in a camper van?

After a (not very long) discussion we said “What’s wrong with Chepstow?”

“Ah, but...” we thought, “there is Chepstow and....err Chepstow.” Much of it is hilly and those properties on the level, often in the lower part of town, often have no off-street parking.

So our search began for a suitable property which we soon narrowed down to one road: the one we now live in. Having identified our target location, a house came on the market and we bought it. After a couple of years spent renovating the place, we took up occupation in January 2018.

We’re not going to name the road, for fear of upsetting all you long standing Chepstonians and sparking a “best place to live” argument, but we think it is the paramount location in the whole town.

We are close to the shops and the leisure centre, gym, surgery, train and bus stations are all within walking distance. The beautiful Monmouthshire countryside can be accessed easily. There are lots of clubs and societies in town.

We haven’t looked back. Our car use is negligible as we walk everywhere. The neighbours are friendly and supportive, especially in these troubled times. The house and garden are far easier to maintain than at our previous home.

Our business involved working with retired leaseholders. We often witnessed people who had moved to a completely different part of the country on their retirement, away from friends and family.

Sometimes this would work out fine, but many of these people experienced loneliness as making new friends in a new location is not always easy.

So consider what is on your doorstep if you choose to downsize. We have gone from “rural nowhere” to “suburban somewhere” and don’t regret it for one minute.

Steve & Hilary Cieslik

MORE MEMORIES PLEASE!

As we will be publishing this bulletin each month under the current circumstances, it’s an opportunity for us all to share memories and feelings about our town and its area. Last month, we asked two questions about your memories of the area.

What are your happiest memories of your childhood in Chepstow?

Why did you move to Chepstow, and has it met your expectations?

All of us should be able to find something to say –if you send your thoughts to me at ghmyrtle@gmail.com, we will publish more in due course

So, please get writing!

Guy Hamilton

DONATED BOOKS FOR SALE

The Chepstow Society has gratefully received a number of donations of books and pamphlets of local interest. If you would like to buy any of these, please contact Guy Hamilton, ghmyrtle@gmail.com or 07786 500609

£30

- Ivor Waters (ed.): Severn & Wye Review (complete set of 8 issues of journal, Chepstow Society, 1970-72)

£15 each

- Ivor Waters: Beachley: Between the Wye and the Severn (Army Apprentices College, 1977)
- Mercedes Waters: In and Around Chepstow (sketches, Moss Rose, 1981)
- Nathan Rogers: Memoirs of Monmouth-shire (1978 reprint of 1708 booklet, Chepstow Society)

£12 each

- Ivor Waters: Chepstow Parish Records (Chepstow Society, 1955)
- Ivor Waters: Chepstow Miscellany (Chepstow Society, 1958)
- Ivor Waters: The Unfortunate Valentine Morris (Chepstow Society, 1964)
- Ivor Waters: Impressions and Versions (poems, Chepstow, 1973)
- Ivor Waters: There was a young lady from Gwent (poem, Chepstow, 1976)
- Thomas Birbeck: Sword and Ploughshare: the Story of the de Bohuns and Caldicot (Chepstow Society, 1973)
- Fred Hando: Out and About in Monmouthshire (1958, reprinted 1974)

£10 each

- Ivor Waters: Chepstow Printers and Newspapers (Chepstow Society, 1970)
- Ivor Waters: Chepstow Clock and Watch Makers (Chepstow Society, 1972)
- Ivor Waters (trans.): Sunlight and Scarlet: selected poems by Antonio Machado (1973)
- Mercedes Waters: Changing Chepstow (Chepstow Society, 1970)
- Eric Wiles: Chepstow and the Chartists (Chepstow Society, 1985)
- F H & M Keyte: Tidenham Parish Registers Part 1 (Chepstow Society, 1970)

- Brunel's Tubular Suspension Bridge over the River Wye (Moss Rose Press, 1984 reprint of 1856 pamphlet)
- S B Rogers: An Early Victorian Severn Bridge (Merlin Bookshop, 1974 reprint of 1845 pamphlet)
- Tales of the People of Old St Arvans (ed. Joyce Edmonds, 1990)
- Whitebrook: a community brought to life through images and recollections (ed. Bevan and Rees, 2005)

£8 each

- Ivor Waters: The Town of Chepstow Part 9 – Hardwick/Bulwark/Castle (inc. copy of 1686 map) (Chepstow Society 1975)
- Mercedes Waters: Chepstow Sketches (Chepstow Society, 1973)
- Arthur Clark: The Story of Monmouthshire Vol.1 (1962)
- Arthur Clark: The Story of Monmouthshire Vol.2 (1979)
- Ray Howell: Fedw Villages: A Lower Wye Valley History (1985)
- Robert Thompson: Images of Itton: The story of a rural parish (2000)
- Chepstow and the River Wye in Old Photographs (2000 edition)

£6 each

- Ivor Waters: The Wine Trade of the Port of Chepstow (Chepstow Society, 1967)
- Ivor Waters: Chepstow Churchwardens (Chepstow Society, 1967)
- Ivor Waters: Leather and Oak Bark at Chepstow (Chepstow Society, 1970)
- Ivor Waters: The Town of Chepstow Part 2 – The Meads / Shipyards / St Ann St (Chepstow Society, 1972)
- Ivor Waters: The Town of Chepstow Part 3 – Lower Town (Chepstow Society, 1973)
- Ivor Waters: The Town of Chepstow Part 6 – High Street (Chepstow Society, 1974)
- Ivor Waters: Margaret Cleyton (Moss Rose Press, 1975)
- Ivor Waters: Poor People (Moss Rose Press, 1984)
- Ivor Waters: The Parish Doctor (Moss Rose Press, 1984)
- Historical Assn., Monms. & Newport: Visit of the Council of the Historical Assn., 1938
- Arthur Clark: The Castle of St Briavels (Chepstow Society, 1949)
- Caerwent Remembered: A collection of memories (2001)
- The Story of Trelleck Grange (2001)
- Jeremy Knight: Civil War & Restoration in Monmouthshire (2005)