

# THE CHEPSTOW SOCIETY



## Members Bulletin January 2021

*www.chepstowsociety.co.uk*

### *Notes from the Chair*

This is the first of my 2021 Chair Notes and, although we do not know what this year will bring, of one thing I am sure, that this year will be a better year for the Chepstow Society than 2020.

I suppose that that could be said of most things this year, but there are several things that make it particularly true for our Society.

First, I am confident that at some point in 2021 we shall be able to hold actual meetings in the Drill Hall.

Although we have been able to hold interesting meetings via Zoom, members cannot meet over tea and biscuits after the talk and the atmosphere in the live meeting cannot be replicated online.

Having said that, I have realised that with the online meetings we have been able to use speakers from anywhere in the country – even in the world – without the expense of their travelling to Chepstow.

I have therefore asked Chris Penrose, who is on the Drill Hall committee, to see if it would be technically possible for speakers to attend our Drill Hall meetings online. Their talks could be shown on the screen and it should be possible for questions to be asked by members of the audience. I will let you know what we are able to do about this.

The other development about which I am very excited is the development of a 'civic' group in the Society.

I set out below the main 'Objects' clause of our Constitution from which you will see that it is a major part of our objects to monitor developments in Chepstow for the purposes stated in subclauses b) and c).

The first exploratory meeting of our civic group, held on 2nd December and arranged by our Secretary, Guy Hamilton, was very encouraging, attended as it was by a number of local Councillors including at least two from the Forest of Dean.

I was very impressed by the regard in which our Society was held and am confident that we shall be able to play an active role in Chepstow affairs in the future.

I do hope that members will continue to join us online until we can meet face to face.

We will continue to send out Zoom links before each meeting to make it easier for members to attend our virtual meetings and if any members are having difficulty with the technicalities please contact us and we will try to help.

In the meantime enjoy the rest of the festive season and we will work towards a bigger and better Chepstow Society in 2021!

*Geoff Sumner*

***The objects of the Society shall be to promote and encourage the following objects by charitable means and not otherwise***

- a) To advance education by the study of local and natural history in the town and hinterland of Chepstow (hereinafter called the 'area of benefit')***
- b) To encourage the preservation, development and improvement of the features of general public amenity or historic interest***
- c) To stimulate public interest in and care for the beauty, history and character of the area of benefit and to stimulate cultural activities in that area***

## **NEXT ZOOM MEETING**

***Richard Hoyle***

### **THE WORK OF THE CHEPSTOW COASTGUARD RESCUE TEAM**

**Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> January**

**at 7.00 pm – via Zoom**

**<https://zoom.us/join>**

**Meeting ID: 562 383 2571**

**Passcode: Waters**



#### **Forthcoming Zoom meetings:**

**Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> February**

**David Scaysbrook**

The secret plane crash in  
the Forest of Dean in 1942

***Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> March***

*Civic and Amenity meeting with local  
councillors*

**Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> March**

**Dr Rhian Morgan**

The King's DNA –  
The Discovery of Richard III

**Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> April**

**Peter Crowhurst - Cecil Rhodes**

## **Chepstow in 20 photographs**

A study of 20 photographs  
taken in and around  
Chepstow in South Wales  
and the unique stories behind each photograph

*16<sup>th</sup> December 2020*

In the last few years, the Chepstow Society has organised a Christmas Party for members. This year, due to the restrictions caused by Covid 19 it was agreed to hold a meeting, as is now the norm, using Zoom.

We were delighted that local historian and photographer, John Burrows, was able to join us on 16<sup>th</sup> December to give his talk, "Chepstow in 20 photographs" - slightly misleading as there were considerably more than 20 pictures.

The talk focused on the extraordinary number of events and anniversaries that took place in Chepstow over the last ten years.

The talk took us from the ancient stones, through the history of the castle, bridges, tides and boats to links with the military, France and local customs and traditions.

Early on in the talk we heard about two anniversaries linked to the castle. First, William Marshal, who was described as the Greatest Knight that ever lived.

This was followed by the re-enactment of the siege of the castle in the English Civil War.

John's great interest in bridges and engineering featured amazing photographs of the Severn Bridge and Wye Bridges, both road and rail.

But the most fascinating section was about how he achieved the picture showing both Brunel's Clifton Suspension Bridge and the Severn Bridge. He explained how, over a number of years he found the right location and conditions to capture this iconic image.

Throughout his presentation, John kept returning to the importance of being in the right place, at the right time – and with a camera at the ready.

***Sallie James***

## CIVIC AND AMENITY GROUP

As Geoff mentions in his notes, on 2nd December the Society held the first of what are likely to become regular quarterly Zoom meetings.

Members of the Society were joined by elected councillors and officers of local authorities, together with other local groups such as Transition Chepstow, interested in protecting and improving the town and its surroundings.

The December meeting was very positive, and discussed various ways forward in terms of improving liaison and working arrangements.

We hope that, over the next few months, we will establish new ways to make sure that the Society can continue to play its part in helping to secure the future of the town and the protection of its environmental assets.

**A second similar Zoom meeting, to which all members are invited, will take place on 3<sup>rd</sup> March.**

A small and informal group of Chepstow Society members has now started to look through local planning applications and policy statements, and to come up with ideas for improving the town's amenity, wellbeing and environment, as well as its adjoining areas.

One possibility is that we shall input to Chepstow's Place Plan, which the town council has said will be published in 2021.

We would welcome new ideas for improving Chepstow, which we may be able to take forward.

These are still very early days, and we would also welcome more members becoming involved in this area of the Society's work.

**For more information, please contact Guy Hamilton - [ghmyrtle@gmail.com](mailto:ghmyrtle@gmail.com) or 07786 500609 - in the first instance.**

*Keith Underwood writes:*

Life member **Eileen Grassby** has decided to leave Chepstow to live with her family in Forest Hill, London.

She is now 91 and finds life less enchanting than she once used to, and the time had come for her to be with her family. The Society owes a great debt to her for the many years when she and Keith ran the marvellous programme of excursions and holidays, right up until 2013. They also initiated some memorable garden parties and, earlier on, Christmas socials.

If members wish to write to her, she would love to hear from them.

*Rather than publishing her postal address here, could any members wishing to write to Eileen please contact Guy or Geoff, and we will pass on her address to you.*

## Local Plan Consultations

**Monmouthshire CC** has published consultation documents on the level of growth and options in the Replacement Local Development Plan (RLDP).

Comments are invited on the questions set out in the RLDP Growth and Spatial Options Paper. The public consultation period extends to **Monday 1<sup>st</sup> February**.

<https://www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/planning-policy/planning-policy-current-consultations/>

**Forest of Dean DC** is undertaking public consultation on its Local Plan, which will guide change until 2041. The consultation period has been extended until the **end of January**.

<https://www.fdean.gov.uk/planning-and-building/planning-policy/emerging-local-plan/>

# Discovering Lives

## The volunteer nurses at the Red Cross Hospital, at Gwy House, Chepstow, and their patients



*Anne Rainsbury, MonLife Heritage Museums Community Curator, writes about a new project that she hopes Chepstow Society members might be interested in, and that you can do from the comfort and safety of your own home.*

Chepstow Museum was successful in winning grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund for a project "Discovering Lives, the volunteer nurses at the Red Cross Hospital at Gwy House Chepstow and their patients".

We know the names of the many women and some men who gave their time during and after WW1 to look after wounded soldiers convalescing at the hospital, in what is now the Museum's home.

We have photographs - and know the names of some but not all the women who appear in them. But we know very little about the majority of them.

The aim is to discover whatever we can about the lives of these women, their families, where they came from and what they did before and after the war. We want to be able to tell their stories. If we can, to trace and contact surviving members of their families and see what they can tell us too.

Their stories will find a place on relevant websites, and we aim to compile a booklet and hopefully create an exhibition.

The other aim is to put together at least a database of all the soldiers who passed through the hospital and, if there is time, to research them too.

It was originally intended that this work would be done by groups of volunteers working together in the Museum, with members of the Family History Society's local branch acting as mentors to guide those with little or no experience of family history, and help them learn how to research people's lives.

But this is not going to happen, so we are taking the project online, and we are going to set up ways that volunteers can work together in a virtual way from home.

We will be starting in early January and working on this until the end of May - so, a great Lockdown Project to get involved in over the coming months!

If any members would be interested in being part of this, please let me know - email [annerainsbury@monmouthshire.gov.uk](mailto:annerainsbury@monmouthshire.gov.uk)

# CHANGES AROUND THE TOWN - DECEMBER 2020



*New housing development at the old Fairfield Mabey (shipyard) site (above and left), and at the former Dendix site (below)*



*Moor Street (above) and High Street (below)*



For a good example of refurbishment in the town, watch the video by Chepstow Mencap of the work they have done inside the old Board School building on Bridge Street -

[www.facebook.com/chepstow.mencap.9/videos/1843662819132316/](https://www.facebook.com/chepstow.mencap.9/videos/1843662819132316/)



*Garden City Way*

# Chepstow and Abergavenny Museums' Art Appreciation Courses – ONLINE

Join us online with our popular and experienced Monmouthshire tutor, **Eleanor Bird MA (Oxon)**, for art appreciation classes. *Anyone can join in, from wherever they are in the world...*

## **The Giants of 19<sup>th</sup> Century Art**

**10 week course starts Monday 18 Jan, 2pm  
or Wednesday 20 Jan, 10.30am**



The talks will explore each week the life and works of a selection of the greatest artists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. From Delacroix to Degas, Monet to Munch, the artists of this era rode a wave of innovation and ideas.

Each lecture will consider the contribution of one of these great painters – there will be the famous names like Whistler, Cezanne and Burne-Jones as well as perhaps the less familiar such as David Wilkie, Paul Signac and Winslow Homer.

No prior knowledge of art history is needed and there is no homework. This is learning for enjoyment and pleasure. If you like looking at art and want to understand more about it – learning how to look deeper and appreciate the ideas and culture of the time – or if you just want to spend an hour a week looking at wonderful images, then give this course a try.

There are two opportunities to join in online for the one hour talks on Zoom: Mondays at 2-3pm or Wednesdays 10.30am -11.30am. The Monday series begins 18<sup>th</sup> January and ends on 29<sup>th</sup> March (with a break on February 15<sup>th</sup>). The Wednesday series begins on 20<sup>th</sup> January and ends on 31 March (with a break on Feb 17<sup>th</sup>). Select your preferred day when you book.

**The course fee is £52 and includes a weekly handout featuring some of the major artworks discussed. Advance booking is essential and all bookings must be made by midnight Thurs 14<sup>th</sup> January. The course fee is £52. Booking is online only, at :**

**[www.visitmonmouthshire.com/art-history](http://www.visitmonmouthshire.com/art-history)**



## **Introduction to Art History**

**Course of 10 weekly one-hour Zoom talks starts  
Monday 18 January, 7pm**



Thinking of trying something new in the New Year? Try feasting the eyes and expanding the mind (rather than the waistline!) by joining MonLife Heritage Museums' new Introduction to Art History course.

If you've ever wanted to find out about the paintings which grace the walls of our art galleries, museums and country houses, our course will lead you through the major art movements, from classical beginnings, through the Middle Ages, into the Renaissance and beyond until we reach the shocking new art of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Explore two thousand years of painting - how did art change, who created it and how did it reflect the spirit of its age?

Watch as the brilliance of Roman art is abandoned in mediaeval times for a heavenly vision of saints and sinners; as the Renaissance rediscovers realism and explores man's place in the world with artists such as Leonardo da Vinci. Learn how art moves away from the religious towards the everyday in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and from the frothy to the serious through the next. In the 19<sup>th</sup>, see how Impressionist painters such as Monet challenge the old masters as the ground is laid for the radical Modernism of Picasso and Matisse.

You don't have to know anything about art history and there is no coursework or homework. This course is about learning something new and having an enjoyable time, once a week, looking at wonderful images, gaining new insights and an understanding of art and encouragement to look at paintings in a new light. It's a visual delight with a range of painting and sculpture to see, each artwork set in the context of its times.

**The course fee for 10 x 1-hour sessions delivered online via Zoom is £52 and includes a weekly handout. The course will start on Monday 18 January and end on March 29 2021 (half term break Mon 15 Feb).**

**Advance booking is essential and all bookings must be made by midnight Thurs 14<sup>th</sup> January. The course fee is £52. Booking is online only, at [www.visitmonmouthshire.com/art-history-intro](http://www.visitmonmouthshire.com/art-history-intro)**

## The answers to last month's quiz:

1. Before becoming connected with Christmas, what was Yule?

*A pagan midwinter festival. It was celebrated by Germanic people and was connected to Norse mythology. With Odin being the Yule Father and leading the wild hunt across the sky. Yule tide is about two months and falls roughly mid-November to early January. In the middle of Yuletide is Yule. Also the word jolly probably derives from Yule.*

2. What Roman holiday, held from December 17<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup>, had a large influence on how Christmas was celebrated?

*Saturnalia. This was one of the most popular holidays in the Roman calendar involving much feasting and drinking. It also involved role reversal when slaves were allowed to be rude to their masters and sometimes were waited on by them. There was also a lot of gift giving especially on December 19<sup>th</sup> – Sigillaria.*

3. In which century was the first written use of the word 'Xmas'?

*The C16. The 'X' in Xmas comes from the Greek letter Chi which looks like an 'X'. This letter has long been used as an abbreviation for Christ since the Greek word for Christ begins with what looks like an 'X'*

4. The modern Santa Claus is mainly a mix of which two figures?

*St Nicholas (Sinterklaas in Dutch) and Father Christmas. St. Nicholas was a C4 Greek bishop who was famous for his generosity and gift giving. His gift day is December 5<sup>th</sup>. Father Christmas dates back to at least C16 as the personification of Christmas cheer and is considered synonymous with our Santa Claus. There is also a bit of Odin who had a long beard and his Wild Hunt is similar to Santa's nightly sleigh ride.*

5. With whom did the German Nazi regime replace Santa Claus?

*Odin. They also renamed Christmas trees, changed the words to 'Silent Night' and even had swastika shaped tree lights!*

6. In which country did 'Silent Night' originate?

*Austria. The music was by Frans Xaver Gruber 1818 and the words by Joseph Mahr 1816. This was sung during the impromptu WWI Christmas truce as it was known by both English and German troops.*

7. Which popular holiday song was written during the Cuban missile crisis and was a plea for peace?

*'Do You Hear What I Hear?' Music by Gloria Shayne Baker and lyrics by her husband Noel Regney.*

8. From what animal parts were the first artificial Christmas trees made?

*Goose feathers painted green. These feather trees were first made in Germany in C19.*

9. Which is the native country of the Poinsettia plant?

*Mexico. It derives its English name from Joel Roberts Poinsett, the first US minister to Mexico. He introduced the plant to the US in 1825.*

10. Which old Christmas tradition signals to people that householders are Christian?

*Putting candles in the window. It was not only a sign of their faith but an invitation to others to join them in celebration.*

11. How many wise men (Magi) does the bible say visited the baby Jesus?

*It doesn't say. They are only mentioned in the book of Matthew where it says that they visited the baby Jesus and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. From this people have assumed that there were three wise men.*

12. In which European country are gifts given by St Basil on January 1<sup>st</sup>?

*Greece, where this replaces December 25<sup>th</sup>. They also bake a rich bread called vasilopita and put a coin inside. They also lay an extra place at table for St Basil.*

13. In which European country might you find money under the table-cloth when you sit down to eat the traditional Christmas Eve supper?

*Poland. But first you fast all day and then wait until someone spots the first star in the sky before you sit down to eat. You might also find bits of hay under the tablecloth in remembrance of Jesus being born in a manger.*

14. Which cartoon character is a Christmas Eve staple on television in Sweden?

*Donald Duck. This started in 1959 when the Disney special 'From All of Us to All of You' but entitled 'Donal Duck and his Friends wish you a Merry Christmas' was shown on television. There were few tv channels in Sweden so it was watched by many people and became a Christmas Eve tradition.*

15. Among Christians who lived in the east, when was Christmas originally celebrated?

*January 6<sup>th</sup>. In the West Christmas was always celebrated on December 25<sup>th</sup>. Now, except for a few like the Armenians, almost everyone celebrates on December 25<sup>th</sup>.*

Photo:

*The photo of a snow-covered High Street was taken in 1947*